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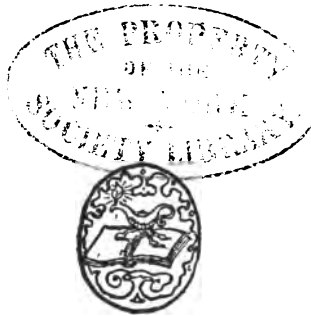
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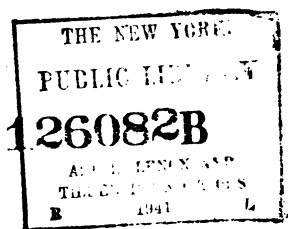


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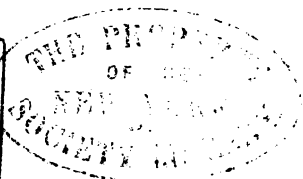
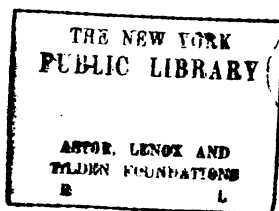
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IN MARKET-OVERT.

CHAPTER I.

A GOOD DAY'S FISHING.

IN a cup of the Bleakshire Downs lies the village of Leaddon. For miles around, save for a solitary farm or a clump or two of wind-swept firs, there is no human dwelling and no trees; but, in the cup, as though dropped into it by some skilful hand from the skies, are just enough of houses to fill it. Most of them are labourers' cottages, with thatched overhanging roofs, and in front a strip of garden, with here and there a few bee-hives—a sign of comparative wealth, for, though flowers are rare enough, the downs, over which sweet airs blow all the summer long, are their feeding ground.

There is the Hall, however, a somewhat dilapidated mansion, with a noble walled garden, and a "butt," as its steep meadow shut in by tall elm-trees is called; and the Rectory, a much more ambitious building, standing spick and span amidst trim lawns, and parterres of the latest landscape garden model. There are also a few farms, of ancient date, in which the picturesque is sacrificed to the profitable, and the windows of the living rooms mostly face the cow-yard, so that all the pastoral proceedings are brought under

the master's eye. There is a church, of course, old enough, but, in its coat of whitewash, far from venerable looking, and in front of it, within a few feet of its God's-acre, stand the village stocks.

It is the surest proof, perhaps, of the changeless and out-of-the-way character of the place, that no one has thought it worth while to remove that "relic of barbarism," as the *Bleakshire Herald*, in an outbreak of democratic indignation, termed it. True, it has not been used for years, but Leadon was the last of Bleakshire villages to use it, and more than one pair of ankles, still supporting their living load, have been encircled by the rusty iron which hangs from its moss-grown staple. After all, unlike those of the pillory, its victims were immensely popular, and many a time these eyes have seen them sitting on the "bavins" of wood supplied by sympathising hands to keep their hind quarters from the damp, and partaking of the tobacco and ale gratuitously afforded them by a generous public. There is also a school-house of the same recent date with the Rectory.

The living of Leadon, at the date of our story, which takes place before the great depression in the landed and ecclesiastical interests, was a fairly good one, though not to be compared with that of its neighbour, Market Overt, which is well known as the prize (not always given to spiritual merit) among all south country benefices; but the noble proportions of its rectory require some explanation. It was once an unpretentious, and even humble, residence enough, but on Mr. Audrey, a scion of the ducal house of Chesterton, becoming the incumbent, he pulled it down, and erected a mansion more suitable to his social position in its place. In this, however, he reckoned without his wife



and daughters, who soon found Leadon insufferable as a place of residence. There was absolutely no society, except that of the Squire's family (which was only one generation removed from trade) and of the surrounding clergy, whom they visited very much as they "visited" the poor, at long intervals, and with some air of patronage. Mr. Audrey, it may be said, was himself a clergyman, but one of a very different kind, to whom a country benefice was a stepping-stone rather than the limit of ecclesiastical ambition; and, indeed, after a year or two, his family influence was so judiciously exerted that he became a canon residentiary in a distant cathedral town, and he and his belongings departed from Leadon in two carriages, without a single regret. Not, however, that Mr. Audrey was a bad fellow; he was upright, honourable, open-hearted, and not illiberal, even in his opinions, but totally unfitted to be the clergyman of a country parish. Unhappily, he had built a rectory quite unfitted for any curate, unpossessed of private means, to dwell in, and his difficulty was to get a tenant. No layman, if in prosperous circumstances and of sane mind, would have come to live at Leadon for choice, unless he had chanced to be an owner of race-horses. The downs in the neighbourhood were an admirable training ground for those noble animals, and it was possible that a person who took great interest in racing might find them a compensation for the lack of other distractions and occupations; but not even a canon residentiary, however far away he might reside, could let his rectory to a person of that description. The rector was fortunate enough, however, to find a tenant in Mr. Barton, a middle-aged divine, who eked out his ecclesiastical salary by taking pupils. This was how Mr. Audrey

expressed the matter to himself; but, as a matter of fact, the eking out was quite the other way, since the salary was but one hundred pounds a year and the house (which cost twice as much in repairs), while the sum received from Mr. Barton's pupils amounted to a very respectable income.

These two divines met but seldom, which was fortunate, for, though there was but little disagreement between them, as between landlord and tenant, neither being men of business, or captious about their rights, they had scarcely an opinion in common, and were each incapable of giving way an inch to the other on matters they believed to be principles because they were convictions. There would certainly have been contentions had they seen more of one another, for, from Mr. Barton's position, Mr. Audrey (as, indeed, most people would have done) took an entirely mistaken view of his character. Here is a man (he doubtless reflected) who derives his income from educating the sons of the aristocracy, and must therefore be devoted to its interests. His disposition must be ductile, conciliatory, and disinclined to opposition. His views of his position—so much more prosperous than he could have expected—are doubtless tempered by a modest humility. As a matter of fact, the curate of Leadon had much more self-respect, not to say personal pride, than his employer, and infinitely more independence of character.

John Barton was the son of one of those unfortunate persons, the name of whose very profession stamps them as incurably impecunious—a perpetual curate. Fifty pounds per annum was all his father could afford him towards his expenses at Oxford, but he had gained an exhibition at a provincial grammar school, the pro-

ceeds of which just enabled him, with that modest supplement, to exist at the University. It was a pity, for by virtue of appearance, manners, and even some accomplishments, he was fitted to shine in any social circle. Though a hard-working student, however, he had little hope of distinguishing himself in those studies which lead to academic honours and emoluments, and his highest ambition was to take a tolerably good degree, and to fit himself, like his father before him, for taking orders. His tastes, though far from extravagant, were refined, and he recognised too well (now that he had been brought face to face with the prosperity of others) that a life of poverty would always be distasteful to him. It was not that he loved luxury or the means of purchasing it, but he loathed the necessity for looking at every sixpence before spending it, and envied the freedom from such sordid cares exhibited by the great majority of his fellow students. His acquaintances, of course, did not lie among the rich, but his abilities were not sufficiently conspicuous to make him welcome with poor students of repute, while his social gifts were very attractive to the intelligent well-to-do. In spite of his poverty, and notwithstanding that he steadily declined hospitalities it was impossible for him to return, he was popular; and though the authorities of his college could not look forward to his throwing any lustre on it, they recognised in the young student respect without servility, and a charm of manner that had no rival within their walls. But, after all, the life of even an undergraduate without the means of purchasing enjoyment in the present, or the hope of prosperity in the future, is but a dull affair to one to whom pleasure is naturally attractive; and John Barton, though brilliant and full

of spirits in company, chafed in secret against his fate. He had few amusements because amusements cost money, but he allowed himself one simple pleasure ; he was, in a small way, a fisherman. When the men of his set were riding, or playing billiards, or getting up picnics to Newnham, he would take his rod (a very cheap one) and try for perch in the river.

One day in the summer term he was pursuing his favourite recreation in a back stream, above one of the "lashers" that make the Isis so dangerous, and every year demand their victims from the University. Standing on some scaffolding that supported eel-pots, he was looking thoughtfully at his float, and wishing, perhaps, that his lot had been cast in more uncivilized times, when a man could catch enough fish to support him, and was not looked down upon by his neighbours for confining himself to that occupation, when his attention was arrested by a canoe with a young man in it, coming rapidly towards him. Canoes were, at that time, a novelty at Oxford, and it was clear that the tenant of this particular craft did not understand its management. Moreover, even for a skilled oarsman, the back stream would have been a dangerous road, since the only way to avoid shooting the fall was to essay the narrow passage between the eel-pots.

Under the unskilful strokes of its occupant the canoe shot from side to side like a purposeless May-fly, a mode of progress which it presently exchanged for a still more perilous one ; it came on in whirls, now this end foremost and now that, for the oarsman had lost his paddle ; even then, if he had not also lost his presence of mind, he could have quitted his craft and struck out for the platform, if only he could swim ; but of that art he was unfortunately ignorant. At the spectacle

of the pale and frightened face which had now come close under his eyes, Barton stripped off his coat and kicked off his shoes. He was a good swimmer, but to jump into a lasher after a drowning man is a dangerous enterprise for the very best; without a moment's hesitation, however, as the canoe turned over in its descent, he sprang at it, seized it with one hand, and then looked about in the eddying depths for its late occupant. This was a much better plan than diving for the man himself, which in that turbid water would have been to strike at random. A curly head, or a head which had a few moments before been curly, appeared at once close to his disengaged hand. He clutched it, and as he had hoped, as the poor wretch came to the surface, his fingers closed upon the canoe itself, which, after a fashion, supported them both. The whole plan, though conceived in an instant, was a happy combination of sagacity and courage.

Still the waltzing about in ten feet of water with a damp stranger, who is not particular as to what he takes hold of, and may transfer his adhesion from his canoe to yourself, without a word of warning, is a position not free from embarrassment. At the third revolution, Barton knew from his sensations what those of his involuntary companion must needs be, and felt it was high time to strike out for the bank. This with no little difficulty he reached, with his derelict cargo.

The stranger, who had never lost consciousness and had more breath to spare than himself, overwhelmed him with gratitude.

"I hope," he said, and the modest expression struck the other as particularly happy, "I shall never forget, sir, that you have saved my life."

"I shall not be so sure of its having been saved,"

answered Barton, evasively, "if you stay here talking in your wet things."

Then they set off at a run towards Oxford, which they reached without another word of conversation. "My college is Christchurch," said the young fellow, "and my name is Trevor," and he produced from his pocket-book a very wet and pulpy card.

"My name is Barton, and my college is Wadham," said the other, "and I hope you will be no worse for your ducking."

All that dwelt upon Barton's mind with respect to the incident was that he had left behind him, perhaps irremediably lost, his fishing-rod, which had cost him five and sixpence.

Even when, having changed his clothes, he looked at the address-card that had been given him, and found inscribed upon it "Lord Robert Trevor," it made no great impression on his mind; but, as it turned out, that afternoon sport of his had made up for a good many days of ill success, for he had landed a very big fish indeed.

CHAPTER II.

A FIRST PATRON.

THERE is no such thing as equality in this country—nor in any other; in more democratic countries there is even still less of it, for though the possession of wealth is there the only barrier between the classes, it is multiplied a hundredfold and is an all-pervading one. At an English University there is, perhaps, the nearest approach to equality, yet the claims of rank are by no

means to be disregarded. It is not only tutors who "honey to a lord;" nine undergraduates out of ten feel, if they do not acknowledge, a certain satisfaction in being hand in glove with the son of a marquis. Barton himself was by no means "a snob," but he had been brought up in an atmosphere in which the theory of hereditary legislature was not suspected of having anything humorous about it, and where the titled class was vaguely spoken of as "that aristocracy which has done so much for us." It would have been difficult to show what it had done for his particular family; but this was a case when it could really do something. This reflection, indeed, did not at present occur to Barton; but it did strike him, when he came to think about it, that he had for the first time in his life met a live lord and shaken hands with him, and the news would be interesting to the old people when he next wrote home. He was sensible enough to know that intimacy with his new acquaintance was quite out of the question; nor, in truth, did he desire it. He had seen enough of Lord Robert to feel that he was a good sort of fellow, but also that he could have few attractions for him as a companion. Our limitations at that age are easily perceived by our contemporaries.

He was reading after breakfast next morning in his "rooms," as the phrase goes, though few undergraduates have more than one beside their bedroom, when a parcel was brought in with "paid" upon it, which surprised him not a little. There was a good deal of brown paper, which always tends to inflame curiosity, and then some waterproof, and then a bundle of joints, which, being pieced together, evolved the most beautiful fishing-rod that eye ever beheld. The nature of its wood was unknown to him, but its strength and elas-

ticity were evident to his practised hand ; its joints were real silver. Never had he seen such a fishing-rod, even in shops. Of course he knew where it had come from ; but that he had not been informed by the fact—that not a line had accompanied the rod—wounded his susceptibilities. He could not but admire the gift, but his gratitude to the giver was greatly mitigated by its curt delivery. What his silence seemed to say was, “ Here is what will make up for the loss of your fishing-rod (and something over). I do not (of course) desire your acquaintance, but it shall never be said that I did not acknowledge my obligation to you ; and now we’re quits.”

A very morbid reflection, it may be said, but not an unnatural one in this young man’s case. A wiser man would have thought otherwise, no doubt, but so would a baser man ; some people would have “ jumped ” at that fishing-rod, and all the more, for the reason that made it distasteful to John Barton, because it came from the hand of one of higher rank than himself. His character was peculiar, and peculiarly ill-adapted to his present condition in life ; he was proud, and he was poor, yet, if he was to succeed in life, it must needs be through the assistance of his superiors ; he had not “ the face ” to make his merits known, nor, intellectually speaking, had he much merit ; and yet he wished, if not “ to clutch the golden keys,” at least to secure a comfortable position. Discomfort of all kinds was disagreeable to him ; he had suffered poverty without becoming used to it ; while what experiences he had had of the enjoyments of a higher sphere made him wish for more. He would have taken a slight from no human being without resenting it, but, if his very modest ambition was to be gratified, he must

needs take favours. But even favours should not be taken if they are bestowed like a bone which is thrown to a dog.

This lithe and tapering rod, a perfect marvel of manufacture, and so obviously adapted for the sport he loved, looked to John Barton's eye unpleasantly like such a bone. He had not the heart to take it to pieces, it looked so beautiful; and as there was no room for it as it lay at length in his moderate-sized apartment, the top joint projected from the window, like the sign of one who dealt in such wares. The very sight of it—with the doubt agitating his mind as to whether he ought to accept it or not—diverted his attention from his studies; he took up his Greek play and laid it down again; then he took up a mathematical work and laid that down. To say the truth, they had neither of them much attraction for him at any time; he read "hard" in more senses than one, but this morning it was less a labour of love than ever with him.

Presently his mind wandered away altogether to his modest home and its surroundings. Even such comfort as belonged to it wanted permanence. Some of his college friends—though not many—had a home they could always call such even in the future. This was not the case, of course, with him; his father was an old man, and at his death another would "take his bishopric," which was a vicarage.

From the garden and the wild
Would fresh associations blow,
And year by year the landscape grow
Familiar to the stranger's child.

It was no uncommon thing that a young fellow should have to make his own way in the world. He did not

complain of having no expectations; but unfortunately he had ventured to entertain hopes of which there was no possibility of being realised. He was in love with the daughter of a neighbouring clergyman in the same position as his own parent; Ellen Morris was a sweet young creature, endowed with all the virtues, as he fondly imagined, but with nothing else. If they were not absolutely engaged, it was because they still retained some modicum of common sense; what was the use of their making indissoluble vows in view of a practical impossibility? A young Oxonian, of a different class from that to which Barton belonged, once gave his reason for not eloping with a belle of that city, that "they had not enough money between them to pay the first pike out of Oxford," and these two young people were in the same position. Day dreams, however, are within the reach of the poorest, and Barton, oblivious of everything else, was picturing to himself the Beloved Object, when there was a modest tap at the door, and in came Lord Robert Trevor.

He was a nice-looking young fellow, with one of those delicate complexions which seem to disclose every feeling of their possessor, and it was evident that he was overcome with embarrassment and bashfulness; like the rose of the poet, which had been "just washed in a shower," he was very red, hung down his head, and was speechless.

"It is very kind of you," stammered Barton, blushing also, and from the same cause, the sense of obligation.

"Kind of *me*," interrupted the other; "I should have been a brute indeed had I not come at once to say, to express——"

"Oh, I didn't mean that at all," put in Barton in his

turn, "though that was very kind, but the fishing-rod; I knew of course it must have come from you."

"Oh, the fishing-rod," said the other, smiling. "I noticed that you had lost yours, and I was so afraid of your buying another at once, that I got the best I could in Oxford rather than wait for one from London."

"It is as good a one as could possibly be," replied Barton; "and infinitely better than my old one."

"I am glad you like it," said the other, pleasantly, but with the air of one who dismisses a too trivial subject. "I am come to-day, however, to say how deeply I feel my indebtedness to you, which I am sure I did not express yesterday; I felt too much like a drowned rat; and, indeed, I should have been drowned but for you, you know."

There was a genuineness and simplicity about the young fellow, heightened, rather than otherwise, by his nervous and embarrassed manner, which appealed to Barton strongly. He was altogether different from the sort of person he had expected to find him, with no airs or graces of any kind, and with an obvious desire to magnify the service done him, which evidenced a generosity of disposition.

"Pray do not say another word about it, Lord Robert," said Barton. It caused him some effort to get the title out. In the outside world such an address on so short an acquaintance would not have been out of place, but in the University such distinctions among undergraduates are ignored, and Barton, though he had no personal experience in that way, was aware that it was so. He spoke as he did, perhaps, with a vague desire to indicate that he was unaccustomed to such acquaintances, and to represent his true position,

of which it seemed obvious his visitor knew nothing. What he feared was that he should be asked to dine with him, or be otherwise placed on such terms of familiarity as could not but prove embarrassing.

"I hope, Barton, you will not again call me anything but Trevor," said Lord Robert, gently. Then, with a glance at the book on the other's table, he added, "You seem to do a great deal of reading; I suppose you are going in for double honours."

Barton shook his head. "It is only that I am not good enough to do much in anything," he answered, simply. "If I find myself in either list I shall be thankful. A fellowship is quite out of my reach. I shall take as good a degree as I can to qualify me as a private tutor, which, perhaps with a curacy, when I have taken orders, will be my vocation. It is not a brilliant future, but Don Ferdinando, you know, cannot do more than he can do; and I am not a don," he added, smiling, "nor ever shall be."

He was glad to have had the opportunity of thus stating his case, and extricating himself from what he felt was a false position; its effect, he thought, would be to release his visitor from the necessity of pursuing an acquaintance on a plane so far below his own; he had, indeed, purposely thrown this object into his tone, so far as it could be done without offence.

It was, therefore, with much surprise that he heard his visitor quietly observe, "May I smoke?" which was certainly not a sign of departure, and, in fact, if he had but known of it, in Trevor's case was one of particular interest in present proceedings. It was only with difficulty that the young lord could give his mind to serious subjects without the aid of tobacco, and the production of his cigarette case was an indispensable

prelude to the consideration of his debts, his bets, or the composition of letters to his "governor." He smoked at all times with impartiality, but on these occasions with especial assiduity.

"I suppose, Barton," he began, between the whiffs, "that it would not be worth your while to waste time in coaching a fellow like me for an ordinary degree?"

"Well, of course I could do that, and with great pleasure, but I am only an undergraduate myself, you see."

"What of that? I am sure you are patient—as you would have to be with me, for I am devilish stupid—because you are a fisherman, and such subjects as I require you have of course at your fingers' ends, and all the better, perhaps, that they have so lately been there. I could learn things from you much better than from a tremendous swell, who would be stooping down from the clouds to accommodate my humble needs. That don't seem complimentary to you, perhaps, but you know what I mean, Barton."

"I do, indeed, and such an arrangement would suit me well enough; but neither your tutor nor your father would probably like it. I think I could coach you well enough, but it is unlikely that they would trust an unknown undergraduate with so important a matter."

"I am sure I can manage my tutor," returned Lord Robert, drily, "and I think I can manage the governor. You see neither of them have the least expectation that I shall get my degree at all. I *have* had a coach already, and he has given up the appointment because I never went to him, as though a sinecure was not the best of all posts. Very honourable of him, of course, but very ridiculous."

"I am afraid I should be equally quixotic," observed Barton, gravely.

"I am afraid you will," replied the other, simply; "but, somehow, I should not mind reading moderately, you know—with *you*. With the other fellow I always felt like some little child who had to repeat 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' to an Astronomer Royal; he was too much up in the clouds for me, whereas you and I will understand one another. Moreover, the governor will see that it is now a choice between you and no coach; much of this is not flattering to you I am aware," added Lord Robert, with a pleasant smile, "but I don't think you are the sort of fellow who cares for that kind of thing. People who enjoy being cracked up are not the men who jump into ten feet of water to save the life of a total stranger. You don't like to be reminded of it, I know," for Barton made a wry face. "You think it a small matter, but you have no idea how large it will look to the governor; he sets quite a fancy value upon my life, because you see I am the only one to succeed to the title. His other children are girls; that makes a wonderful difference to him. You'd be quite surprised what store he sets by me."

"I am not at all surprised," said Barton, smilingly, "that your father should be very fond of you."

"Well, I don't know as to that," said Lord Robert, simply. "The governor is not particularly gushing; however, you will hear from him in a day or two, and be able to judge for yourself. May I say that you will be my tutor?"

"If it is approved of in the proper quarters," replied Barton, "I shall be pleased indeed."

Then, what is very unusual in University circles, the two young men shook hands and parted.

In due time there arrived for John Barton, Esq., Wadham College, a letter with a coronet outside it, and signed "Melrose," as if his correspondent had been a town. In stately but courteous terms it acknowledged the indebtedness of the writer for the service that had been done his son, and expressed a hope that the acquaintance thus begun between the two young men should be continued to their common advantage. "I hear from Lord Robert that he proposes to read with you," it went on, "during his stay at the University. This, I fear, will not be an exhaustive process, and, as I am advised, three hundred a year will be a reasonable sum at which to estimate your loss of time. If, however, Lord Robert should succeed in obtaining his degree, I must be permitted to add the sum of £500 for the obligation you will have then conferred upon me. He tells me that your destination is the Church, in which, unfortunately, I possess no benefice to place at your disposal; but with respect to your other design of taking private pupils, I have no doubt my influence will be of use to you, and it will always be at your service."

CHAPTER III.

THE PUPILS.

FROM that letter of the Marquis of Melrose may be dated the foundation of John Barton's fortune, such as it was. He coached Lord Robert for his degree, and by assiduous but judicious treatment, and with a dead lift at the last, contrived to pull the young nobleman through. This unexpected result was hailed at Castle

Melrose with boundless satisfaction ; his mother ascribed it to her son's amazing talents, but his father had the sagacity to recognise the true worker of the miracle. Barton had been several times his guest, and had made a most favourable impression on the family ; indeed, in the case of one member of it, though it turned out to his advantage, he made on his last visit a much too favourable one.

The lady, Adelgitha Mureena Plantagena Trevor, the Marquis's eldest daughter, had the extreme imprudence to cast eyes of love upon the attractive young tutor. Her affection was not reciprocated, for, as we know, it was bespoken, but that he had not divulged, nor, had he done so, would it have made any difference ; none could have supposed that "a previous engagement" would have stood in the way of so brilliant and seductive a temptation. The safety which his fidelity to his betrothed had ensured him was ascribed by the Marquis to what he considered a much higher feeling, his sense of the disproportion of rank. There was no scandal, and only the Marchioness knew how near there had been one, and Barton left the castle for good, not only with his five hundred pounds in his pocket, but after the five fingers of his noble host had cordially clasped his own. He had hitherto only given him two, except on the day he had brought Lord Robert home a B.A., when he had given him three ; even the judge upon the circuit and the Lord Bishop of the diocese only got four fingers.

Nor when Lady Adelgitha got married to one of her own station in life, which took place six months later, did the Marquis forget the double debt he owed to John Barton. No sooner was he ordained than he was besieged with applications from the nobility to take their

sons as pupils. These young gentlemen were not candidates, of course, for University honours; an ordinary degree was the summit of their ambition, and generally beyond their expectations; still, a man that had coached Bob Trevor through, could, it was reasonably believed, do the same for anybody.

He had presently a list of applicants in advance, like that of a fashionable school; in selecting curacies—for the curacy was an element that enhanced his profession as a tutor with some parents, though its emolument was of little consequence to him—he had to be guided almost solely by the extent of the house accommodation they offered; if there was a good house in the place he took it. Each of his young gentlemen paid him three hundred a year, and three fifty if they kept a horse.

It must not be supposed, however, that John Barton did not duly perform his ecclesiastical duties because of his other profession. It could not be said, indeed, that he had any particular "call" for the ministry. Few clergymen have. It is cynically said of members of the Bar that many are called but few are chosen; but in the Church—and probably in every church—the reverse is the case. John Barton never shirked his "duty," he had plenty of time for it, for his hours of teaching were necessarily limited; his pupils would not have stood long hours, and he was kind, and charitable, and pure. If he was not a good priest in a high theological sense, he was a good Christian as Christians go. He was respected by his neighbours, and beloved by the poor. His association with the aristocracy had had no injurious effect upon him; he was neither a time-server nor a flatterer. Indeed, considering his position, his character was exceptionally independent. If

he got, as now and then necessarily happened, a black sheep into his fold, no matter how high his rank, he returned him, civilly but firmly, to his sire or dam; he could not afford, he insisted, to have the rest of his flock contaminated. But in reality he was actuated by higher motives; he hated debauchery, brutality, heartlessness, and every kind of scoundrelism.

The atmosphere of his home life was very pure and wholesome. As soon as he had felt himself in a position to do so he had married his first and only love; and now after nearly a quarter of a century she was dearer to him than ever. She had borne him two daughters, Clare and Rose, now grown up, and both very handsome. This was a great disadvantage to their father's profession, and would have been fatal to it but for the character he had established at Melrose Castle, and which served him in good stead. A man who had had the good principles to resist marrying a marquis's daughter would never, it was said, permit one of his own to inveigle into matrimony a young man of wealth and position intrusted to his charge. On the other hand, some maintained that paternal authority, however scrupulously employed, might not be able to prevent such a social catastrophe; so that, though as much a *persona grata* to his aristocratic clients as ever, Mr. Barton had not so many of their offspring intrusted to him as of old.

At the time our story opens there were but three pupils with him at Leadon; Richard Rivers, a younger son of Lord Ripton, a "new creation;" Ralph Leicester, the only son of a Leicestershire baronet; and Robert Avis, the nephew of a Mr. Puddock, a gentleman of great wealth, but whose relatives and antecedents were unknown, not because they were "lost in

the mists of time," but because, in Mr. P.'s view at least, they had never been worth knowing. However, he was himself a millionaire, known to everybody, and allied to the aristocracy by the firmest bonds, for he had lent many of them vast sums of money. He had no son of his own, but his nephew stood in the place of that missing link, and he was resolved that nothing should be wanting to fit him for that place in society which he was destined eventually to fill. For that purpose he had sent him to the A 1 (as he expressed it) of private tutors.

The only one of these young gentlemen who had enjoyed the advantages of a collegiate career had been Rivers. He had only enjoyed them for a short time, having been "sent down" in his third term for a serious breach of discipline, a circumstance which had so enraged his father that he refused to let him complete his University career. It had not been his first peccadillo by any means, and indeed his relations with his parent had for a long time been a good deal strained. Lord Ripton had many sons, and this one, if not the worst, had given him the most trouble. "He did not understand his position," said his lordship, "and was given to low company." This was not quite true, but he certainly did not like Lord Ripton's company—a commercial one of the highest standing—in which he had an enormous stake. Though a younger son, with many brethren, Richard declined to take advantage of the opportunities which his father's connection with "high finance" could have placed in his way. He preferred hunting and shooting, and even racing—just as though he had been an eldest son. In this respect he was even more heir-like than the heir; unfortunately he had £5000 of his own, inherited from his mother, which

caused him to despise the threats of disinheritance which his lordship constantly held over him without perhaps any serious intention of putting them into effect.

What Richard was quite prepared to do was to emigrate to Australia, and make his own way in the world in the position that most pleased himself, chiefly on horseback. He was a son of the soil, but not necessarily of the English soil; he had the frame and good nature of a giant; loved outdoor life, sports, and physical exercise, and despised business and the trammels of society. He had been sent to Mr. Barton as a last chance; at Leadon he could hardly get into mischief; if that gentleman, with his immense experience, unparalleled reputation for giving polish to the raw material, failed in civilising him, then, said his lordship, he might go to the devil. He did not really, however, believe his son would go so far as that, nor even to Australia; he had a habit of expressing his opinions upon all subjects, save financial ones, rather strongly.

Mr. Barton had formed a better opinion of Rivers, which was shared in no less degree by his household. He thought there was good stuff in him, though his position was unfavourable to its development or manifestation. At present he was the square man in the round hole, and his angularities were very open to inspection; but in emigration, thought the tutor, might lie his salvation. He was quite old enough for it, being three-and-twenty years of age.

Ralph Leicester had more talent than Rivers, but his character was not as manly, which might, however, be owing to the delicacy of his constitution. He was far beyond the age at which young men generally go to the University, but ill-health had thrown him back in his studies, and his father was unwilling to expose him to

even the slight risks of college life. He was now fairly well, but his previous education had produced in Leicester a certain effeminacy, which did not, of course, escape the attention of his fellow-pupils, and caused him to be spoken of familiarly, not contemptuously (for he was very popular), as Lizzy. He had a fine tenor voice, and sang delightfully (not always drawing-room songs), which was a great attraction to them; but he could also play an accompaniment on the piano, which was thought rather a girlish accomplishment. He kept a horse, but Rivers, who could not afford one, generally rode it. He might have kept a coach and four if he pleased (for he was the only son of his father, who doated on him), and would doubtless have preferred it to riding. He looked upon a horse at best as a means of locomotion, and never willingly made his two-hundred-guinea steed a subject of conversation, a circumstance which to his young friends was unintelligible. Still, he was good-tempered and extremely generous, so that his eccentricities were forgiven him. He was dark and slight; beside the handsome Saxon Rivers, he looked almost insignificant, but he was well grown enough, and his pleasant face was ornamented with a very becoming moustache, to which he paid great attention.

Robert Avis was senior to both his companions, and looked even older than he was. He was stout, but very strongly formed; even Rivers could only just hold his own with him in a wrestling match. He was a bold rider and a fine cricketer, but not so active at lawn-tennis as the other two. He was too solidly built for it. Curiously enough in one of such thews and sinews, he wore his brown curling hair long (which caused him to be called Samson in the pupil-room), and was greatly

addicted to quoting poetry. How such a man could have descended, however indirectly, from the Puddock stock was amazing. His uncle had probably never so much as heard of Shelley, whose verses his nephew had at his fingers' ends. This cultivated taste, in contrast to his sturdy appearance, and perhaps still more with what might naturally have been expected from one of his upbringing, a certain vulgarity of manner, produced an impression of incongruousness in Mr. Barton's mind which was not favourable to Avis. If his pupil's intelligence had taken a more usual direction, though he was far from exacting as a teacher, he would have preferred it; but, with the classics and mathematics, Avis was almost as hopeless as Rivers. This, however, was of little consequence, as mere learning was a very secondary consideration in Mr. Puddock's mind in sending his nephew to Mr. Barton's.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW SCHOOL-MISTRESS.

THE windows of the drawing-room of Leaddon Rectory had a pleasant look-out on a summer's day. The garden, though new, was large and well kept; the lawn was as smooth as velvet, and sloped down to what good-natured persons termed "the lake;" it was, in fact, but a good-sized pond, and had been so called till Mr. Audrey had made an ornamental water of it. It boasted of an artificial island, a boat-house of very small dimensions, and two swans. Still, it contrasted favourably in extent with the ponds upon the Downs,

which were the only "great waters" known to the neighbourhood. The element was rare there, and in dry seasons, such as the present, the horses and cattle of the village came to drink at it; only an iron railing indicated what was private and what was public property. This militated against the seclusion of the place, but added to its picturesqueness. It was pleasant to see the great horses come down to take their fill, like elephants at a jungle pool, and the patient cattle standing knee deep in the cool liquid, and slowly swishing their long lails in protest against the flies. Only one large tree grew by the brink, but, like a great rock in a weary land, it afforded comfort to many of these four-footed creatures.

Their smock-frocked guardians—for the frock was still worn at Leadon—brought them at morn and eve, with inarticulate cries, which, mellowed by distance, fell pleasantly upon the ears. Such was the outlook from the drawing-room on the afternoon we have in our mind; and the inlook, had anyone been rude enough to stare through its windows, was not less attractive.

Mrs. Barton and her two daughters were taking their five o'clock tea together, and discussing parochial matters, in which the young ladies took almost as great an interest as their mother. She was one of those women whom little children, with their instinctive good taste in such matters, call "bootiful." She was no longer young, of course, and, indeed, because her hair had turned grey earlier than usual, looked older than she was, but there was that sort of juvenescence about her, nevertheless, which some women have till their lives' end, though their years may be matriarchal. Her complexion was exquisitely clear

and bright, her eyes soft and gentle, and her movements still light and graceful. Her family were devoted to her, upon her merits; but, perhaps, in their case, the extreme fragility of her appearance—which seemed to augur ill for the continuance of her presence among them—added something to the tenderness with which they regarded her. It was their test of a pupil—and not a bad test—whether he fell in love with their mamma at first sight or not; if he did there was good hope of him, nor was there any record, when he had once done so, of his proving unfaithful, for the more you knew of Mrs. Barton the more you liked her. Indeed, even bad pupils—black sheep—who had refused to worship her at first sight, had in the end bowed down at her shrine, and, in the dark day of expulsion and disgrace, had taken that little hand and pressed it, in sign that there was some good in them yet; or, at all events, some appreciation of good. Her gentle voice was always for mercy, even under a dispensation in which harshness was unknown, and, to say truth, which had its faults on the side of laxity.

Her eldest daughter's theory was, that in some previous state of existence dear mamma must have been rather wicked, because she had always such a sympathy with evil-doers. Clare herself had no weakness of that kind, and flashed scorn at men rather too readily from her beautiful eyes. She was tall and fair, and moved like a goddess among the sons of men, to whom she was not universally, however, an object of worship. The pupils could not deny that she was a very fine young woman, but her strength of character was even more remarkable than her physical proportions; it was not that there was too much of her—her figure, though commanding, was too symmetrical for that

suggestion—but she was too much for the young gentlemen. They admired her, but at a respectful distance.

With Rose, on the other hand, with her gentle look. (which reminded one of her mother), her soft brown hair, and gazelle-like eyes, they were all at their ease; they did not fall in love with her, she was too saint-like for that, “too good for human nature’s daily food,” but she seemed to them, somehow, like their sister—only much better looking.

“But Hannah is so young,” observed Mrs. Barton, in a tone of expostulation. “I don’t deny her fitness, nor the excellence of her character, but the question is, will she be able to maintain discipline in the school?”

“I am no older than Hannah, my dear mother,” replied Clare; “and yet I think I have kept order there pretty well.”

Mrs. Barton looked up—literally up—at her daughter with what—except that slyness was altogether foreign to her—might have been almost called a sly smile. “Well, you see,” it seemed to say, “you are five feet ten, and with a manner to match;” but what she did say was only, “the cases are hardly parallel; you have your position to back you; but Hannah Bryce is only the carrier’s granddaughter, and neither the boys nor girls will owe her any respect; that is to start with.”

“That does not speak well for our pupils, does it mamma?” observed Rose, gently.

“My dear child, they are but human, like ourselves. The same sort of feeling—class prejudice—is everywhere; moreover, Hannah is so exceedingly good-looking.”

Clare laughed aloud; not a contemptuous laugh, but

one of humorous enjoyment. "And do you really think, mamma, that the boys will fall in love with Hannah? There are only two of them, I believe, who are over fifteen."

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Barton had not been thinking of the boys at all. There were reasons why she could not disclose her real objection, which after all, perhaps, had not much ground to stand upon, and Clare's argument was in itself unanswerable.

"Well, I'll speak to your father about it," said Mrs. Barton, which her girls, not without reason, set down in their own minds as an equivalent to a victory. For when Mrs. Barton recommended anything relating to the government of the parish to her husband, his consent was a foregone conclusion.

After luncheon, which was the time for such interviews, because Mr. Barton was then most at leisure, she mentioned the matter to him; it had already been occupying his mind, for the village school-mistress had accepted a better situation elsewhere, and her place was vacant.

"The girls, my dear, are very anxious that you should appoint Hannah Bryce. It would be a charity, of course, for she has no one but her grandfather to look to, and there is no doubt of her efficiency; she has long been our best scholar; but, then, she is so very young."

"She is young for such a post, no doubt," he replied, thoughtfully; "I confess I had not thought of Hannah for that very reason. But efficiency is the first thing to be considered. It will relieve us, too, from the necessity of importing a stranger, of whom one can know nothing. I really think it is not a bad idea of the girls."

"It is unfortunate she is so good-looking," murmured Mrs. Barton.

"Why?" inquired her husband. "Do you think her pupils will be her lovers? Young as she is, she is two years older than the oldest of them."

"That is what Clare said; I did not like to hint to her that Mr. Leicester has lately taken a class in the school."

"Leicester, my dear Nellie?" he answered, gravely, "Leicester is a thorough gentleman; of all the pupils I have ever had, he strikes me as the one most incapable of a baseness. I think nothing of his having volunteered to help me with the boys, because that may have been merely a good impulse; others have done so, before now, without giving good fruit in other respects, but Leicester, without pretension of any kind, is an honest young fellow of the highest principles."

"I am sure of that," said Mrs. Barton, smiling at her husband's enthusiasm. "I know that he is as great a favourite with you as Rivers."

"My dear, I have no favourites," said Mr. Barton, but with a little flush that seemed to justify the imputation, nevertheless. "I like Rivers because he is such a manly, straightforward fellow, and has been severely misjudged; but, if you ask me in which of my pupils I put the most confidence, I say in Leicester. There is absolutely no danger of his making a fool of himself."

"I was thinking of the girl."

"Quite right. That is of much more consequence; but, independently of the high opinion I have of her, she is quite safe—safe as one of our own daughters—so far as Leicester is concerned. You may dismiss any apprehensions of that kind from your mind."

"Then I see no objection to Hannah's being school-

mistress. The sooner she undertakes her duties the better, so I will go round and talk to her at once."

Old John Bryce, the carrier, lived in the last cottage in Leadon, close to the edge of the Downs. He was fairly well to do by reason of his trade, which he had carried on for nearly half a century; his son, Hannah's father, had been parish clerk, but, dying in middle age after a not very prudent career, had left his orphan daughter wholly unprovided for. Since then, the old carrier had been father and mother and grandfather to her in one, and grudged her nothing; but he, too, like his son, was not a saving man, and it had often crossed kind Mrs. Barton's mind how hard it would go with Hannah when the old man should die, against which contingency this appointment of school-mistress would, so far as a livelihood were concerned, ensure the girl.

It was therefore with great pleasure that Mrs. Barton had seen her apprehensions in the matter set aside, and now found herself at the carrier's gate with such good tidings. The cottage was the best in Leadon; thatched with straw and low roofed like the rest, but with a little porch in which, in their season, hung the honeysuckle and the rose. The garden, too, though small, was full of old-fashioned, sweet-smelling flowers; it possessed two rows of beehives and a draw-well, with moss-grown sides, which looked very picturesque. On the whole, it was not an inappropriate home for the village beauty.

That was what everybody called Hannah, who had seen her, and did not belong to the village. As a prophet has no honour in his own country, so it is with even the prettiest girl in the hamlet; her neighbours took Hannah as a matter of course. Her bright brown hair, of which she had such a profusion; the hazel

eyes, which shone so sweetly and so softly ; the shy and modest smile that found its silent way at once to the manly heart ; the figure so tall and yet so "lissom," made up only what was called a "comely wench" to neighbour eyes. But to outsiders, unprejudiced by the callousness of familiarity, Hannah was a very beautiful girl. One or two of the young men of her own class had indeed received a vague impression to this effect, but, as their admiration, mostly expressed in winks and nudges of one another, had not been reciprocated, they had bestowed it elsewhere, and the girl was understood to be fancy free.

Though her speech was of course provincial, it was not disfigured by vulgarities ; and her voice was soft and low. Her education, for her station in life, had been good, for she had educated herself ; what she had learned at the village school, of which she had been the show scholar, having merely formed its groundwork. Her grandfather's calling had enabled her to procure books on hire from Marbury, the nearest market town, those of the parish library having long since been devoured. Yet she was not at all in appearance like the majority of those young women who spend their days in reading and self-culture ; she looked the very impersonation of youthful vigour ; the occupations of an outdoor life had given her health and strength, without injury to her elasticity of movement, or even to her complexion, which was singularly delicate. She was drawing up the bucket from the well as Mrs. Barton opened the garden gate, and the girl's unconscious grace as she performed this simple act struck the lady, who had a fine sense of natural beauty, with admiration.

The girl herself, the mossy well, the bucket with

the bubbles of clear water "winking at its brim," the one crowded flower-bed, and the yew hedge that framed it all, made, indeed, a charming picture.

At the click of the gate the girl turned round and, with a smile of respectful welcome, came down the path to meet her visitor.

"I am come to have a few words with you, Hannah," said Mrs. Barton, "upon a serious matter."

The blood rushed to Hannah's cheeks, and into her eyes came a look of fear, such as one sees in the eyes of a frightened fawn.

"Nay," continued Mrs. Barton, reassuringly, "it is nothing to be so alarmed about, my dear. It is, on the contrary, very good news if, at least, you would like to be our new school-mistress."

"It is, indeed, good news, ma'am," answered the girl; not only gratefully but, as it might have struck a keener observer, with also a certain tone of relief. "I do not say that I expected it, but I have sometimes ventured to hope for it, though I know such good fortune is beyond my merits."

"You speak like a book, Hannah," replied Mrs. Barton, smiling, "but that only shows that you are cut out for a school-mistress. I knew you would be pleased at the appointment, but I must talk to your grandfather about it; perhaps he will be unwilling to spare you for so many hours."

They were both aware that this possible objection was but a fanciful one, and Hannah's beaming face said as much; still, as in duty bound, the girl answered that it was only right her grandfather should be consulted, and that he was now within doors, if Mrs. Barton would be so good as to see him.

That lady therefore entered the cottage, where she

found the carrier, amid boxes and parcels, preparing for his afternoon journey. He was a prematurely old man, bowed and feeble, and expressed his pleasure at her tidings in a querulous tone. He was getting past his work, he murmured, and it would be a comfort to know, when his time came, that his granddaughter would be thus in a manner provided for.

"She is a good girl, but too poor to be so pretty, you see, ma'am." Mrs. Barton understood what he meant.

The path of the poor is set with snares,
What are joys to others, to them are cares.

And the pride she took in the beauty of her own daughters, she was well aware, would have been alloyed with fear had they been in Hannah's position.

"As you say, Bryce, it is well to be placed out of the reach of temptation; but your granddaughter is a good, well-principled girl, about whom, I hope, you need have no fears."

"I have no fears of the girl, but only *for* her," said the old man, simply. "There is no one but me for her to look to."

"And me," said Mrs. Barton, kindly. "I shall make it my business to do so; and her being school-mistress will give me not only the right, but the opportunity. Some one has ridden up to your gate. Perhaps you are wanted."

The carrier was next the window, and looked out through the plants which as usual crowded it. The poor keep their windows closed, even in summer, and their plants inside them; while the rich open their windows and keep their flowers outside: the look-out was therefore indistinct.

"It is Mr. Leicester, I think, ma'am; yes, that's his horse. I can see Hannah a-patting its neck."

"What can Mr. Leicester be here for?" said Mrs. Barton; the circumstance was displeasing to her; it awoke the apprehensions which had so lately been put at rest.

"It's about some parcel from Marbury; the young gentlemen often come here on such errands."

Mrs. Barton did not like *that* information either, though it was a natural thing enough.

She brought her interview to rather an abrupt conclusion, and moved herself to the gate, but before she reached it horse and man had gone, and Hannah was coming up the path with a parcel in her hand.

"What is that?" inquired Mrs. Barton.

"Something one of the young gentlemen has brought for grandfather to take to Marbury."

By "the young gentlemen" Leadon folks always meant Mr. Barton's pupils.

"It was Mr. Leicester, was it not?" said Mrs. Barton, with a look that was perhaps more scathing than she intended, and which brought the colour into the girl's face.

"No, ma'am, it was Mr. Rivers, but he was riding Mr. Leicester's horse."

"Oh, that was it, was it?" said Mrs. Barton, smiling. The girl's answer had been a real relief to her. "Well, it is settled, remember, that you begin your duties, Hannah, next Sunday."

CHAPTER V.

AVIS AFFORDS INFORMATION.

EVERY young gentleman at Mr. Barton's had a comfortable study—bedroom and sitting-room in one—but there was also a "pupil-room" which they generally preferred, because tobacco-smoking was allowed there. The three pupils were sitting there on the Monday after Mr. Barton's ecclesiastical patronage had been bestowed in the manner described. Leicester was reading "Herodotus" with no very earnest attention, Rivers *The Field*, with considerably greater interest, and Avis a French novel in its English translation.

"So now we know, Master Leicester," he said, "why you volunteered your services for the village school."

"Indeed," laughed the young gentleman addressed; "then you are very clever, for I am hanged if I know myself."

"Come, come; that will not do. Have you really no explanation to offer?"

"Only that I was led on to it; to borrow one of your favourite quotations—

As one black sin brings on another
Like little nigger Pickaninny riding
Pick-a-back upon him mudder;

for having offered to read the lessons, when Bart (meaning his preceptor) had a sore throat, I thought I might as well help him also in the school room for a day or two, and then I stuck to it."

"He is a perfect Machiavelli, our friend Leicester, is he not?" observed Avis.

"I should be better able to agree with you, if I knew what a Machiavelli was," returned Rivers contemptuously. "Why don't you talk English?"

"If I did—that is plain English—I should say Leicester became a school-master in order to make eyes at the new school-mistress."

Rivers puffed at his pipe and studied his *Field* with increased diligence; Avis was not a favourite of his, nor did he admire his conversation, even when it was not, as often happened, studded with verse.

"But not having the gift of prophecy," remonstrated Leicester, "I don't see how I was to know that the young person in question would be made school-mistress."

"It is just possible she told you; I warrant you have often talked to her on the sly."

"Why do you say that?" interposed Rivers, sharply, from behind his newspaper. "You are quite aware that it is not true; and it is a very cowardly thing to say of any young girl in her position."

"I was not speaking to you, nor of you," replied Avis, drily.

"It is lucky you were not, perhaps; my temper is not so angelic as Leicester's, and I should not have liked it."

"Now really," said Leicester, the good-natured, "I do beg you two fellows will not quarrel about me. Avis was only speaking in joke, of course, and a very poor joke it was. If he wants to have my place in the school he is welcome to it."

"To lecture upon Zola," said Rivers, pointing to the French novel, "an excellent instructor of youth he'd make."

"Well, I don't pretend to be a saint, and to concentrate my affections upon my horse—or another man's horse; and I see no harm in talking to a pretty girl if you can get her to listen to you."

"You said on the sly," remarked Rivers, drily, "and I say again——"

"Now don't, *don't* let us have it all over again," pleaded Leicester; "of course Avis was wrong, and he knows it. It's just the sort of thing—I mean what he hinted at—that would put old Bart's back up, who hates slyness of all sorts, and quite right, too."

"Yes, but Bart is paid to lecture one, and other people arn't," remarked Avis, significantly.

Here Rivers folded up his paper and walked quietly out of the room.

"There, now you have driven Rivers away," said Leicester, indignantly.

"Let him go, and be hanged to him," retorted Avis. "He is in a most beastly temper."

"I beg your pardon; I know Rivers better than you do; you made him angry, no doubt, but he was very sorry that he expressed himself so strongly; and if you had given him the opportunity he would have said so."

"Very well; then you may tell him that I'm sorry too. But it was none of his business from the first; nobody would dream of connecting *him* with the softer passion. 'A little better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse,' would not even be true of any young woman *he* fell in love with; he would put the dog and the horse before her."

"Then it was only me you intended to insult," observed Leicester, drily.

"No, nor you neither; of course, as you said, I was

only in joke. Why everybody knows, who has half an eye for such things, that your affections are engaged elsewhere."

Leicester's wholesome countenance suddenly became carmine.

"Your face convicts you, if conviction were needed," continued Avis, mercilessly. "Sometimes I used to think it was Clare, and sometimes Rose. What a lucky beggar you are, who only have to throw your handkerchief to either of them, marked in the corner with the bloody hand. What a thing it must be to be a Baronet in the bud—not that I am dissatisfied with my own position.

How e'er it be it seems to me
'Tis only noble to be good."

Avis had really no little humour, but Miss Clare thought him desperately vulgar, and even Mrs. Barton did not think him "quite so nice as dear John's pupils usually were." Rivers openly avowed, "the man is a cad," and perhaps Leicester himself, though he never expressed himself strongly, shared in some degree that opinion. It was therefore strange that he should have been so exceedingly embarrassed and put out by the other's remark on his affections being engaged. What could it signify (he tried to argue with himself) what a fellow of that kind said about anybody? And how could he know—no, of course he couldn't *know*—but what could he mean by any person with half an eye being able to see that his affections were engaged? If he had said that *he* (Leicester) was engaged, he could have contradicted him honestly enough. As to blushing, that was nothing; some people can't help blushing at every impeachment, especially a soft one; only, as he well remembered—and as this dreadful person per-

haps remembered—he had not blushed when accused of flirting with Hannah Bryce.

It was most unfortunate he could think of nothing to say; some counter chaff, or even anything to change the subject.

“Come,” said Avis, persuasively, “which is it? Confide in me.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Oh yes you do, you know quite well that I am referring to one of Bart’s pretty daughters. That you should both be ‘Barts’ by the bye, (for you will be one some day) is a curious coincidence. Shall I tell you which it is? That may help you perhaps if you are still in doubt. You are *not* in doubt? (this at another blush from Leicester). Well, of course not. It is Rose. The other would never suit you; she is too fond of athletics, too, so to speak, open-airy. Well, now I will tell you something that will please really you, my dear fellow.”

“It will not please *me*,” said Leicester, with as indifferent an air as he could assume, “but if it pleases *you*, pray say what you like.”

“Well, then, Miss Rose is in love with you already; I have a natural talent for observation, and am sure of it. When you and Rivers left the drawing-room the other night after that long talk about his emigration, in which she betrayed such little interest—and no wonder; that great gawk has no more attraction for her than an ostrich has for a nightingale—she instantly began talking to me about *you*. Don’t tell me it was merely to change the subject; I know better. It was the way she talked of you, perhaps, more than the words, so quietly and yet tenderly, and the way she looked after you as you went out. You have only to

say, 'Rose, I love you,' without a word about the future baronetcy and your father's rent roll, and you're the man for her money; I don't say 'and she's the woman for *your* money,' because, to do her justice, she is not a girl to think of such things. There may be difficulties, of course, with your governor—and indeed with *her* governor, for Bart has all sorts of ridiculous scruples—but Sir Innes probably—taking a charitable view of the average of human nature—is not such a wholly unsentimental cuss as my uncle Puddock.

Beside *him* place the god of wit,
Or one of Beauty's rosiest girls,
Apollo for a star he'd quit
And Love's own sister for an Earl's.

My uncle Pud is wrapped up in the confounded aristocracy, and has set his mind upon my marrying one of them. But your position is different, and as regards yourself and Miss Rose, I am positively certain you have only to go in and win. That's my straight tip, and I daresay you don't thank me for it."

"I don't indeed," said Leicester, frankly.

"So it always is with the advice of a friend. But there's eleven o'clock striking, and I must take my Ovid to my tutor. Ovid is like Zola in many particulars, but not nearly so amusing." Here Mr. Avis exchanged the modern author for the ancient, and left his companion—with a wink and a nod—to his meditations. It may seem extraordinary that such madcap utterances as he had been listening to should have made any serious impression upon any human being; but Guy Leicester was very impressionable. He had, also, though he quite perceived the vulgarity of Avis's nature, a higher opinion of his intelligence than perhaps

it deserved. It was not, however, without reason that that young gentleman had plumed himself upon his talent for observation. Nothing of a superficial character in the conduct of his fellow creatures escaped his attention. His impudence was abnormal. If he had been an omnibus cad he would have been at the summit of his profession; many of our politicians—glib and ready speakers, apt at repartee, and keen to mark the mood of their audience—remind us of this calling, but nature had cut Avis out for it.

Circumstances, however, had interfered with its pursuit.

His ample stock of quotations was not in general adapted for the exigencies of street traffic. Shelley from the foot-board would have been out of place, and Mr. Avis had Shelley, or scraps of him, at his fingers' ends. Clare had once spoken of him in the family circle as a mixture of Punch and Shelley, which her father, no doubt with the recollection of some more serious delinquency that had come within his tutorial experience, had drily replied, "Let us be thankful it is not at all events Gin Punch and Shelley."

He was indeed a curious anomaly; like Mr. Foker he might not be clever, but he was "downy," and had that kind of cleverness in a high degree.

Whether he had drawn his bow at a venture, or arrived at it with natural skill, that shaft of his about Leicester's affections being engaged had gone home. Though very emotional, Leicester was far from demonstrative, his nature was too modest for that. He had seen little of the world, but he had a conviction that women admired men of thews and sinews, outdoor men, whereas he was essentially an indoor one. His boyhood had been surmounted with difficulty, and

though his health had been now re-established, the effect of a long period of illness, followed by one of convalescence, remained. His temper, as Rivers had said, was "angelic," but his moods were morbid. He underestimated himself almost as much as Avis erred in the other direction. It would have seemed to him impossible that any woman, especially such a one as Rose Barton—so shy, so retiring, so almost secretive in her ways—should, of her own nature as it were, entertain a tender regard for him.

Yet Avis had said it was so, certainly not in joke, but with confident conviction. It was a revelation, if it was to be credited, calculated to raise the self-esteem of any young gentleman. But on Guy Leicester it had not this effect at all. It only rendered something that had been very difficult before well-nigh impossible, and made him very miserable.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUSPICION.

IN addition to the horse which he so seldom rode, Guy Leicester possessed a bicycle, which he used still less frequently. This was not much to be wondered at, for the country about Leadon was singularly ill-adapted for the two-wheeled steed. Though the grass of the Downs is very short, it is still grass, and what cyclists prefer is the smooth road. There were roads, of course, in the vicinity, and tolerably smooth ones, but they were exceedingly hilly. It required a clear head and a firm nerve to descend them on the machine,

and as to going up them, the best and shortest way was to get off and drag them, neither of which exercises suited Leicester. His bicycle was a marvel of skill and finish, and had cost more than Mr. Barton's pony trap with the pony into the bargain, but it was not nearly so often used. The baits that Sir Innes had set for his son and heir, in the hope of their tempting him to take to open-air enjoyments, were utterly fruitless, and hardly produced so much as a nibble. Still, he did sometimes ride his bicycle, though he more often led it, from the cause above mentioned. Avis declared that much the same thing happened when he went out on horseback; but this was a libel. Leicester could ride well enough, and was quite at home in the saddle, but he did not care for riding. Mr. Barton sometimes insisted on his taking "a stretcher" with him—a long walk out and in—but he much preferred to accompany the ladies in their less extensive rambles. The two girls were good walkers, but in their company he never showed symptoms of fatigue, though his tutor would humorously impute them to him.

"So the two young ladies have walked you quite off your legs, I hear, Leicester;" whereat the young man would flush up very much, and be more annoyed than his tutor dreamt of, for even Mr. Barton sometimes made mistakes with his pupils.

One day that gentleman had driven to a clerical meeting some miles away, and on returning late in the evening beheld quite a remarkable sight. As he reached the summit of the last hill but one that lay between him and Leadon, he perceived toiling up the last hill Leicester on his bicycle. This was itself remarkable enough; but what made it more so was that he was in company with a young woman, who, unless

he was very much mistaken, was no other than the young school-mistress. There was no great harm in it, of course; he had probably overtaken the girl, and, being well acquainted with her, from the fact of his having a class in the school, had entered into conversation with her. If it had been anyone else but Leicester, he would have said that he was accommodating his pace to hers, but he felt at once that the case was the contrary; she must be accommodating hers to his, and this he did not like. It was significant of Leicester's character that, though if alone he would undoubtedly have walked up the hill, he kept his seat on the machine because he was in female society. He always shrank from indulging his natural distaste for exertion when in the company of the other sex. These may seem unimportant reflections, but Mr. Barton's life had been passed in discovering the peculiarities of youth and in guarding against the possibilities of their getting into mischief. He had the highest confidence in both these young people, but he knew what little prudence even the best of young people—and perhaps the best the least—usually possess. He had great responsibilities upon his shoulders—as, indeed, he always had had—but perhaps at present his greatest responsibility was Guy Leicester, the only son and heir of a devoted father, who had intrusted him to his particular care. If he had ventured to express himself upon a subject, which he always avoided—for favouritism would have been fatal to his position—he liked the young fellow better than any pupil he had ever had. A kinder heart he knew never beat in a young man's breast than in that of Guy Leicester, but *that* was not a possession which was a guarantee against love troubles. He was also (for one of his age) very high principled, but that

again might be a source of danger (under certain social circumstances) rather than of safety. Indeed, as he reined in his pony and watched those two figures going slowly up the distant hill, Mr. Barton for the first time repented having placed Hannah Bryce, however qualified she might be for the post, in a position which had necessarily brought her into some sort of relation with Guy Leicester.

That the girl was a good girl he was well convinced; her whole life, so long as it lasted, had been blameless; a good daughter (or rather granddaughter), a diligent pupil, of modest behaviour, and beloved by the children whom, though it had been only for so short a time, she had shown so apt a capacity to rule and teach. But then, unfortunately, she was so beautiful. She was conscious of it, of course; how could it be otherwise? Yet, she bore her beauty like a flower, without flaunting it. She was no flirt, or it would certainly have come to Mr. Barton's knowledge, for village gossip is the most penetrative of all rumours. Still, he felt that there was danger in the contiguity of these young people, and it troubled him. He was not one of those who act on impulse and abhor suspense; and, in order to take time for reflection, he drove direct for the stables, went upstairs to change some articles of attire, and did not present himself to the family till after a considerable interval.

It was a lovely evening, and he found them all out in the garden, in lounges and deck chairs; Leicester in a hammock, in which he had been placed by the whole company, being swung by Rivers to a lullaby of Avis, from his vast *repertoire* of ballads, which even included those of the nursery. A more innocent babe than he looked it was impossible to imagine, though a trifle

fractious. Everyone was in the highest spirits, and even Mrs. Barton was laughing with the girls in her quiet way. In the after times, her husband often thought of that pleasant picture, on which no coming evil then threw its shadow. How sad it is that close to the flower of happiness grows ever the nettle danger; that, as we are told to beware when men think well of us, the smile of mirth is also to be mistrusted, and even high spirits themselves seem by their presence to predict their opposites.

"And where have you been, and what have you been doing," inquired the master of the house, "while I have been away?" His words were addressed to the party generally, but his eye rested involuntarily, and yet with such particularity on Leicester, that that young gentleman felt called upon to reply. "As for me, sir, I fear that I have been doing nothing,—at least nothing to speak of."

Which was the very thing that Mr. Barton feared.

"But I am afraid, papa, that so far we have been all helping Mr. Leicester," cried Clare, smiling, "and are equally deserving of your condemnation."

"That is very kind of you, Miss Clare," said Leicester; "one doesn't mind rebuke"—he was going to say "with you to share it," but was struck dumb at the proposed audacity, and turned as pink as a cherub.

"He doesn't mind being in a scrape, he means, if he can get other people into it also," explained Avis, didactically.

"I don't think that is quite Mr. Leicester's character," said Mrs. Barton, gently.

"To be in a hammock and be complimented would suit me down to the ground," continued Avis the irrepressible.

"If you lay in a hammock, my dear fellow," said Rivers, "and waited for compliments, you would enjoy a great deal of horizontal refreshment."

"And what did the Archdeacon say, John?" inquired Mrs. Barton, opportunely. She wished not so much to stop a quarrel as to prevent the necessity of her husband doing so, not on the *nec Deus intersit* principle, of which it is probable she had never heard, but to avoid a row. She had been as beautiful in her time as Helen of Troy, but, unlike her, had always been a promoter of peace.

"Well," replied Mr. Barton, who had seen too many broils among young persons *in statu pupillari* to be the least disturbed by them, and who was also thinking of something of much more importance, "the Archdeacon exercised his well-known functions. He argued the question of Daylight Illumination in a masterly manner, but with some diffusiveness."

"He also argued round about him," whispered Avis to the recumbent one, who, recognising the quotation, became secretly convulsed.

"Then the rural dean told us a capital story of his churchwarden, a railway contractor and devoted to his interests, who offered to extricate him from the difficulties of the lighted candle question by putting the church in connection with his gasworks."

"And what was Mr. Giles's view?" inquired Mrs. Barton, earnestly; not that she personally cared one half-penny, but because no matter about which her husband had been engaged was without its interest for her.

"Mr. Giles said he should suspend his judgment. If judgments get ripe by being suspended, like Jersey pears, I know of no man's that ought to be more mature."

"Still, for a rector of Market Overt, with £3000 a

year, and so young a man, too," pleaded Mrs. Barton, "it surely shows a certain modesty of disposition,"—a speech only of a piece with her usual charity, but which caused the two girls to exchange a surreptitious smile. Mr. Giles had shown signs of admiration for Clare, which, under the circumstances, could hardly fail to give a mother pleasure. There was really nothing to urge against him, save a certain want of decision of character and a habit of preaching extemporaneously without the gift; Market Overt was almost as good as a bishopric, with few of the outgoings. He was, of course, extremely well connected (or how could he have been presented to such a thing?); but somehow he was not pleasing to Miss Barton the elder, and of course her sister knew it.

"By the bye, Mr. Giles told me, Rivers, that you were at Marbury yesterday," observed Mr. Barton; he spoke somewhat abruptly, as a man in authority is apt to do when he wishes to change the conversation, for his wife's apology had not escaped his attention, and there were reasons for his regretting it. Perhaps it was the abruptness that startled the young gentleman addressed (though he was not of the fawn-like sort); but he did startle, and even hesitated, which was not his wont, in stating that he had ridden so far because Leicester's horse wanted exercise.

"I wish I had known you were going," said Mr. Barton, "because old Bryce did not go to the market as usual, and I wanted——"

"Oh, but you are mistaken, sir," interrupted Avis, "or at least I know," and here he began to stammer, "that I saw the carrier's cart go by at the usual time."

"Then the old man must have found himself better," remarked Mr. Barton, indifferently. "I know you keep

a horse for Rivers, Leicester," he continued, smiling; "but you have a bicycle, presumably, for your own use. Does that never want exercising?"

"Well, yes, sir, occasionally," answered the young fellow, cheerfully. "After a long rest it seems to me more unmanageable, when going down hill, than ever."

"And going up hill, you always get off it?"

"Leicester's bicycle, sir," observed Avis, "is like young Scroggins at the Sunday school, who, when spoken to rather sharply by the new school-mistress, said he must be led, and not drove."

"Why, I never heard that story, Clare," said Mr. Barton, smiling; "in these days of educational ana it would be a welcome contribution."

"I never tell tales out of school, papa, and, indeed, I don't know how Mr. Avis learnt it. I hope we have no traitors in our camp."

"Upon my word, Miss Clare, I never told Avis," exclaimed Leicester, rising in his hammock with such earnest vehemence that it turned over and landed him at her feet, amid universal laughter.

"I have not got out of you, even yet," persisted Mr. Barton, when the unhappy young man had recovered his equanimity, "whether you have been bicycling lately or not? To-day, for instance."

"Well, no, sir, I took a long walk——"

"You went with us," interpolated Miss Rose, "about two miles; I am sorry you thought it a long walk."

Avis gave Leicester a secret dig in the ribs, as much as to say, "Now you've done it; she is naturally annoyed with you." Leicester had been pink before, but now he was crimson, as though a rose had become a peony.

"No, sir," he stammered; "I have not been out on my bicycle to-day, sir."

"There, he has confessed," said Mrs. Barton, tenderly; "now I will not have Mr. Leicester put to the question any more."

The laugh went round, but her husband did not share in it. He was greatly troubled in his mind. He felt that Leicester had told him a direct falsehood, and that he must have had a good reason—which was also a bad one—for doing so.

CHAPTER VII.

A DELICATE INQUIRY.

MR. BARTON had probably been called a good many names in his time, for the inhabitants of a "pupil-room" are given to express themselves with great frankness, but none had ever called him a disciplinarian. If it was not "Holiday Hall" at his establishment, it was a very go-as-you-please description of seminary; not only was a great deal of liberty enjoyed by his young gentlemen, but to their faults, though rarely blind, he was extremely kind. The nature of his profession would have compelled him to be lenient, even had he not been naturally disposed to be so; but there were some lapses from good behaviour which were treated with great severity. Lying was one of them. Many of his pupils had been dull, and more of them idle; but to acquire learning was not the chief object of their being sent to him. On the other hand, they were all supposed to be gentlemen, and were expected to behave as such.

If a deliberate lie was told him by any of his pupils, the offender was not only spoken to in a very serious manner, but warned that if it occurred again his company would be dispensed with ; and if it did occur again that pupil was returned to his friends—doubtless with a very different story of his own from that of his tutor.

That Guy Leicester could have told a deliberate lie would have seemed to Mr. Barton, an hour ago, an impossibility. But he had no doubt of the matter. The young man had said that he had not, that day, been out on his bicycle, and he had seen him on it with his own eyes. The distance, it is true, at which he saw him had been considerable, but there was no other bicycle in the village. It was not too much to say that the incident wounded Mr. Barton ; gave him great trouble and distress of mind. Moreover, since lying was certainly foreign to the young gentleman's character, it made the occasion on which he had told it infinitely more serious. If he had only met Hannah Bryce by accident, or was exchanging a few words of ordinary conversation with her, it would not have been worth his while to do his nature such a wrong. To be sure he had said " to-day," so that he might have excused himself on the ground that he had gone out in the evening, and not in the day-time ; but if so, the quibble was as bad—nay, it was worse than the direct falsehood. If he had lied in one thing, he would lie in another ; and, therefore, any direct accusation of his having flirted with the girl would probably be denied ; this, at least, was what Mr. Barton said to himself, but in reality, perhaps he shrank from giving himself the pain of securing further proofs of his pupil's mendacity. At all events, he decided not to speak with Leicester in the first instance, but with the girl herself. He did not tell his wife about it—as most men, perhaps,

in his position would have done—because he did not wish her to share his pain. Whether Leicester was his favourite pupil or not, he knew that Mrs. Barton had a very tender regard for him. Even Clare—though her tastes and habits were so different to his own—preferred him, or so he thought, to the others; to Avis naturally enough, but also to Rivers, whose characteristics were more in accordance with her own; and Rose, as might have been expected, he was also convinced, liked Leicester best—if liking was not too strong a word, for her speech and ways were so retiring, that she rarely expressed her views upon the pupils. It was no wonder, therefore, that this unpleasant revelation gave Mr. Barton great uneasiness.

There was music, as usual, in the drawing-room later in the evening, and it seemed amazing to him—though, indeed, it was but another proof of the young man's duplicity—how Leicester could sing and play, as if he had not a care in the world, or a falsehood to one who had certainly shown himself his friend, upon his conscience. Mr. Barton himself was an exceptionally pure-minded man, and it annoyed him to see the friendly and almost familiar manner with which the girls treated this young fellow, who, it seemed to him, had acquired their confidence under false pretences. If they had seen what he had seen, they would certainly not have been so demonstrative; for by this time, such was the effect produced upon the tutor's mind by the other's falsehood or subterfuge, that what he had seen took a much more serious colouring than it had originally worn. When the incident had happened, it had appeared to him, at the most, a not excusable flirtation; but a deliberate liar was capable of a far worse offence, the very thought of which filled

his heart with indignation, and also, perhaps, of some fear of consequences to himself.

It had happened to him before—to what man in his position has it not happened?—to experience trouble from the amativeness of young gentlemen committed to his charge; but, if anything was seriously amiss as regarded the present case, the circumstances would be infinitely more distressing and its consequences far more disastrous. It was of the girl of whom he was chiefly thinking; a good girl, he was convinced, who, by no conduct of her own, had invited calamity; one who had been the best scholar—and the best conducted—in his own school, and was now its mistress. When he found himself in his own dressing-room, thinking the matter out all over again, Mr. Barton felt that, if not hasty in his conclusions, he had drawn them with too strong a hand; but the thing necessarily vexed him sorely and disturbed his rest. He would certainly speak to Hannah before another twenty-four hours had passed over his head.

Mr. Barton was a man well qualified to deal with “all sorts and conditions of men,” but that phrase does not necessarily include the women; and, as regarded the enterprise he was about to undertake, he would better perhaps have left the management of affairs to his wife. There is no doubt about it, that in reproofs and remonstrances with the fair sex—and especially if they are young and fair—men, unless they are downright brutes, are at a disadvantage. They are slow to believe that such angelic creatures are capable of dissimulation, and they can't stand tears. A woman, on the other hand, when her suspicions of one of her own sex are aroused, is not easily satisfied; and as for the culprit's tears, they are as drops of rain on a duck's back.

If, indeed, his mission had been to reprove the sinner, though she were a woman as beautiful as Venus, Mr. Barton could have done it. As a clergyman, it had been his duty, on more than one occasion, to do it, and he had not shrunk from it; but such was not the task that now lay before him. His hope and belief were that warning, rather than reproof, was required of him; and he was very far from thinking Hannah Bryce a sinner. To impute ill-conduct to a young woman, who had never exhibited the least sign of lightness, was abhorrent to him. He intended to speak to her as to one who was in danger, and was also herself dangerous, but who was ignorant both of the one fact and the other.

Still, however clear his course lay before him, he was not happy in his mind as he took the road next morning to old Bryce's cottage. It was a market day, and the carrier would be from home, and he was pretty sure to find Hannah alone; and this proved to be the case. She was sitting in the cottage porch, diligently engaged in sewing buttons upon an old coat of her grandfather's, and, in spite of her occupation, made a picture that might have illustrated a poem. At the sight of Mr. Barton coming through the garden, her hand sought her bosom as though to subdue a sudden pain there, some throes of thought that agitated it with vague alarms.

It was not his habit to visit the Well Cottage, though Mrs. Barton and the young ladies were pretty frequent visitors there. Had he already some fault to find with her as regarded her scholastic duties, or in other respects? His face, as she read it through the little side window of the porch, by its gravity suggested a fault. She rose and received him with a timidity that was

itself attractive, and as far removed from bashfulness as grace from awkwardness; if it had been purposely assumed to excite sympathetic commiseration, which it was not, it could not have effected its object more completely, or perhaps so well. He reproached himself for having obviously alarmed her, but only as he would have done for having unintentionally frightened a tame rabbit or a little chicken.

"There is nothing the matter, Hannah, or at least I hope not," he said, kindly; "but I have come to have a little talk with you upon a matter which gives me some anxiety." The girl led the way into the cottage and dusted him a chair, as the custom was at Leaddon on the occasion of a call, though not a speck was to be seen on that article of furniture or anywhere else. The little room was a model of neatness; you might have eaten your dinner off the deal table without a plate. The contents of the one shelf of books were signs of use—with one exception—but no more of dust than a library with glass doors.

"The subject I wish to discuss with you," continued Mr. Barton, with tender gravity, "is a delicate one; but you must understand that it does not necessarily involve blame to yourself. It concerns the behaviour towards you—take this chair—of one of my pupils."

It almost seemed, whether he had offered her a chair or not, that she would have taken one by the summary process of dropping into it, so instantly did she take advantage of his invitation. Her face became as white as the wild marguerite that stood in a jug upon the table, and she murmured, "Oh, sir, what *do you mean?*" as though she had scarce strength to utter the words. It was not the stammer of guilt (or so it seemed to her companion), but the embarrassment of pained surprise.

"I say again, Hannah," he continued, "that I make no charge against you of any kind. I am quite willing to believe that, if anything is amiss, you are not the one to blame for it; but it is necessary, for your own sake, for me to get at the whole truth of the matter. Are you in the habit of speaking to Mr. Leicester except in the school-room?"

"Certainly not, sir," she answered, and this time not only distinctly, but with a certain simple dignity that became her admirably.

"Perhaps I should not have said 'in the habit,'" resumed Mr. Barton, apologetically; "but has he spoken to you at all?"

"Occasionally, once or twice, not half-a-dozen times in all," she replied, with an air of reflection, "he has said 'Good morning,' or 'A fine day,' and on one occasion I remember he asked me how I liked teaching."

"Was that all that he said to you yesterday, for example?"

"I did not see Mr. Leicester yesterday, at all, sir."

"What!" he exclaimed, with astonishment, and not a little severely; "do you mean to tell me that you held no conversation with him, when he was out on his bicycle last evening?"

"No, sir; Mr. Avis, who was riding Mr. Leicester's bicycle, did overtake me, as I was returning from Market Overt, and spoke to me, as indeed, though very seldom, he has done before. He is a very kind young gentleman, and has occasionally lent me books such as I have no means of getting elsewhere; but he has never addressed a word to me that I could not repeat to you; I have never dreamt of its being wrong to answer when he spoke to me; but, if it is wrong, I will beg him never to speak to me again. But I am quite

sure that he meant no harm, sir, and I should be very sorry if, because of me, he should get into trouble; not," she added, hastily, "that I am at all afraid of his not being able to clear himself, if you think it right to speak to him. Only I should be ashamed——"

"Just so, just so," interrupted Mr. Barton, smilingly; the fact was he was delighted to find that Leicester's character, at all events, was cleared, while at the same time he felt convinced that Hannah was telling him the truth. "It was injudicious of Mr. Avis, as I must needs tell him; of course you may answer him when he speaks to you, and, in future, he will be more careful. He never sees you alone, of course, except as happened yesterday?"

"Never, sir; but he is always so funny, as well as kind, that I have sometimes laughed, which was perhaps a liberty."

"Laughing at innocent jokes is not a sin, my good girl, nor even, as you say, a liberty. Well, I am glad this little matter has been explained so satisfactorily, though I never had any doubt of it, so far as you were concerned. Mrs. Barton has a high opinion of your character, and so have I. Why you have got quite a library here;" he had risen to go, and was standing by the bookshelf and examining it with some intentness. "This seems a new acquaintance," he continued, taking down one of the books. "Shelley's Poems! that is not a book I expected to find here. Are you a reader of Shelley?"

"Only lately, sir," returned the girl, with simplicity. "That was one of the books that Mr. Avis was so good as to lend me."

"I do not think his choice a very good one," said Mr. Barton, indifferently; "however, it is only the

minor poems, I see." Then suddenly dropping the book into his pocket, he said, "Upon second thoughts, Hannah, I think your collection would be better without this Shelley, and I will return it to Mr. Avis myself." With a nod and a kindly smile he took his leave, but when the holly hedge concealed him from his young hostess, his forehead wore a very unaccustomed frown, and his lips murmured with bitter emphasis the words "A scoundrel."

This was curious, because, though at first Hannah Bryce had certainly betrayed some confusion, and even alarm, she had maintained throughout the interview a calmness and confidence which betokened entire innocence of any ill-behaviour with the young man in question; she had been perfectly frank about her relations with him, and evidently perceived no more harm in the book having been so unexpectedly taken away from her by Mr. Barton than in its having been lent to her by Mr. Avis. Though she sighed, indeed, when her visitor departed, there was no sorrow in the sigh, but, on the contrary, a note of unmistakable relief, such as anyone might use who, having been apprehensive of something unpleasant, had found it to have "blown over."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. AVIS PROTESTS HIS INNOCENCE.

WHEN Mr. Avis came into Mr. Barton's room that morning with his "Ovid's Metamorphoses," he found his tutor metamorphosed. Instead of the genial smile that gentleman usually wore, gravity sat on his lips

and displeasure on his brow; and it was with a very different voice from the genial one he used with his pupils that Mr. Barton uttered the words, "You may put that book down, Avis; I have a much graver matter to talk to you about."

"Indeed, sir," responded the Irrepressible, in a tone that was cheerful, if not absolutely jaunty; "I hope there is nothing wrong."

"I hope not; but I fear there is; sit down." The chair the tutor pointed out was not the usual one, and was so placed that the light fell full on Mr. Avis's face, bringing out the features in high relief, and betraying to Mr. Barton's fancy a certain Jewish origin, which he had always suspected and was now convinced of. He was far too liberal-minded a man to be prejudiced by race, but the discreditable doings of certain of his pupils in connection with bill stamps and Hebrew money-lenders suddenly recurred to him. Above all, Mr. Avis now for the first time reminded him of his uncle, Mr. Puddock; and *that* was an unfavourable association of ideas. He had nothing to complain of in that gentleman's relations with himself; he had been very civil, and of course punctual in his payments; but he was not of the class with whom he was accustomed to deal, and, to say truth, had given him the impression—no doubt deepened by report—of successful roguery.

"How long is it since you have been in the habit of meeting and talking with Hannah Bryce?" inquired the tutor, sharply.

"With the school-mistress, sir? I have not had any such habit," returned the young man, with a slight flush. "I have spoken to her occasionally, and that is all."

"You have never lent her books, for instance?"

"Well, yes, sir, I have. I have lent her Keats and Shelley, which she had never read. I did not think she would care for either, but she tells me she does. It is strange in a young woman in her station of life, and I think it does her credit."

"Without going into the question of her education," said Mr. Barton, severely, "do you think, in thus conducting yourself towards a girl, as you say in her station of life, you were behaving with propriety or like a gentleman?"

"I meant nothing that was ungentlemanly, if that is what you mean, Mr. Barton," returned the young man, earnestly, and with no little spirit. "I am sorry you should think otherwise of me. I am not a lord's son, nor yet a baronet's; but I hope I am not a black-guard."

It was impossible to doubt the genuineness with which he repulsed Mr. Barton's suggestion. If that gentleman had not had the proof in his hand (or what he considered such) of far worse ill-behaviour on his pupil's part, he would have been staggered by his tone; even his allusion to his fellow-pupils, though not in good taste, was, to one of a jealous disposition and conscious of social inferiority, by no means unnatural, and gave an air of *vraisemblance* to his defence.

"What you say, Avis, would not be unreasonable," admitted the tutor, "if what you have told me of your relations with Hannah had been the whole truth. But you have not only lent her books, or a book, very undesirable to one of her age and station, but, in order that she should not miss the intention with which you did it, you have marked in the index with your own initials, certain poems, which I have no hesitation in saying seem to me to be meant to convey your feelings

towards herself, and if so, are little less than a deliberate attempt at seduction."

"So help me, heaven," said the young man, rising from his chair, and speaking with great warmth. "I have done nothing of the kind, sir; I do not pretend to be better than my neighbours—and I know am thought to be worse than some I could mention—but I am quite incapable of such a baseness."

If Mr. Avis was acting a part, he was a very good actor; Mr. Barton felt far less sure of his ground than he had been half an hour ago; but after all the facts were just as they were.

"Here is the index," he said, "and here are your pencil marks. They are opposite to the poem beginning 'I arise from dreams of thee in the first sweet sleep of night;' there is nothing wrong in the lines you may say; but are they proper lines, under the circumstances, to which to draw the attention of a young girl like Hannah Bryce, and by inference to yourself. Again, 'I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden, thou needest not fear mine;' is there nothing significant or to be read between the lines in that poem; once more then is the stanza 'I can give not what men call love,' etc., which I cannot conceal from myself, is intended to be read, 'I can give not what men call marriage.' I may be doing you wrong, Avis, but——"

"You *are* doing me wrong, sir," interrupted the young man, with a gravity, and indeed a dignity, of which the other had thought him incapable. "Whatever opinion you might have formed of me—and I knew it was not a good one—I could not have imagined you thought me capable of such conduct as you describe. I acknowledge that I have done very wrong in lending Hannah the poems marked as you describe; but they

are very favourite poems of mine, and have been so marked for years. In lending her the book, that circumstance had escaped my memory; though, even if I had remembered it, I doubt whether I should have seen the impropriety to which you allude; I see it now, and I apologise for it, and I hope, sir, I have persuaded you that I am not the scoundrel you took me for."

"You have, Avis," said the tutor, holding out his hand, "and I apologise, in my turn, for having taken such a view of your character; not a word, if you please, about what has passed between us to anybody—for the girl's sake; her only possession is her character, and a blot on that scutcheon would be her ruin."

"As to her scutcheon, sir, in my opinion, 'A simple maiden in her flower is worth a hundred coats of arms,'" replied Mr. Avis, "but I am not likely to speak about the matter for my own sake," the dryness of which remark, accompanied by its quotation, almost upset the tutor's gravity; he felt, too, half inclined to smile, inasmuch as a most unpleasant investigation had turned out very much better than he had anticipated.

"I am afraid there is not much time for Ovid this morning, Avis," he said, pleasantly.

"I am afraid not, sir," replied the young man, with a ludicrous pretence of regret, "and by the bye, sir, am I never to speak to Hannah Bryce again; not 'good morning' nor 'good evening,' she is (pleadingly) such a very good-looking girl."

"Well, then; just a word or two of that kind, or she may think there was something amiss in your previous relations, which I am now convinced was not the case."

Perhaps Mr. Barton would not have been so certain had he been able to witness the young gentleman's be-

haviour on reaching his own room. Mr. Avis dropped into his armchair like one exhausted with physical fatigue, and fairly roared with laughter. "I never heard of such a confounded row about talking to a pretty girl in all my life. I wish to goodness old Bart had asked me whether I had ever kissed her; because, though I have often wanted to, I could have answered 'No' with a clear conscience. I might just as well have done it, now, and had a few happy moments. Leicester has had many a one, I'll bet a shilling, and Rivers too; no, I don't think Rivers has; Rivers is a cold-blooded animal, always thinking of horses and guns and emigration; I wish he'd emigrate instead of thinking about it, and at once. If he has a weakness in the amatory direction, it is probably for Miss Clare. Nature has cast them in the same mould, in some respects, at all events; but of course that's out of the question, even if she cared about him, which I don't believe she does, not tuppence. These aristocratic young gentlemen are not their own masters, one is glad to think, as to matrimony. Now, when Uncle Pud gets off the hooks, I shall marry whom I like, and just at present I like Hannah as well as any lady. She laughs at my jokes, she appreciates my taste in poetry, and is most uncommon good-looking. If I was to be so foolish, however, old Bart would never believe one word of what I told him this morning, though it was as true as death. What a game it was, to be sure!" Here Mr. Avis threw up his heels, like a colt in a meadow, and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. "Well, I've got out of my Ovid this morning, which is, at all events, one to the good; and I am sure that old Bart has got quite a good opinion of me, which is another. Like Mr. Sargent in his Sunday coat, I am astonished

at being so respectable. I have now a little balance to draw in that way, which I never had before, and can afford to commit a few atrocities."

As for Mr. Barton, he was at first as well pleased as his pupil at the result of their interview. His conscience rather smote him for having judged the young man so severely. That he was rather vulgar might be true enough, but that was a crime for which his environment and bringing up were mainly responsible; that he could be guilty of any act of deliberate vice, he no longer believed. He felt that he had been as hasty in his conclusions in regard to him as he had been in Leicester's case, and this wounded his *amour propre*, for the very thing he prided himself upon, and which, indeed, the nature of his profession especially demanded, was a cool judgment and a reluctance to give way to first impressions. Still, Mr. Barton could not help wishing, as a preceptor of youth, that his young school-mistress was not quite so pretty and had never given her attention to the works of Shelley.

Though his apprehensions were completely set at rest, so far as his present pupils were concerned, she would always be a source of danger in the future, and if he could have got her an eligible situation in somebody else's parish, who did not take pupils, he would have preferred to do so. However, a private tutor, even more than most of us, has always something to worry him; and he now proceeded to give his attention to a rather disagreeable letter he had received from Lord Ripton that morning, which he had only put aside in order to settle what had seemed to be a more serious trouble. His lordship wrote as usual to complain of his son. It was a long letter, but not a wise one; and though, as regarded Mr. Barton, courteous

and complimentary in a high degree, it pained the tutor.

"You think better things of Richard," wrote his lordship, "I know, than I do; but you have not had my experience of him. He has the obstinacy as well as the stupidity of a jackass. From what has recently come to my knowledge, I am convinced he hankers more than ever after his foolish scheme of emigration. I have a plan for him, which does not require great abilities, or much self-sacrifice—to most men it would involve none at all—the work would be light and the emoluments considerable, but of course he cannot undertake it out of doors, and on horseback, which it seems is his idea of human existence. He has, I find, been making inquiries of an Australian firm, which point to some immediate design of leaving the country, and of course abrogating all the advantages of his birth and position; if he does this I wash my hands of him; but you have great influence with the lad, and if you could convince him of the folly, indeed the *madness* of such a course, you would place me under a lifelong obligation. I know that your ideas rather differ from mine, upon the matter in question, but I also feel that your loyalty and good feeling will cause you to advocate his father's views in preference to his own. I have every confidence in you, my dear sir, and am sure that with you the sense of duty to those who intrust their sons to your care is paramount. I am aware of the difficulty of the task I propose to you; if it were a money matter (though Richard unfortunately is not wholly dependent upon me) or a mere vulgar intrigue, I should know how to deal with it, but upon this subject I am powerless. Pray do what you can for me." There was much more in the same strain; but here was

enough, and more than enough, to trouble the tutor. For nothing is more difficult than to argue a case when one's reason is not "retained on the same side," and, as has been said, Mr. Barton's own view of Richard Rivers was, that he was much better fitted for the back woods of Canada or the Bush in Australia, than to sit on a board of directors (for it was no mere high stool that was offered him) in the city.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ACCIDENT.

MR. BARTON touched the bell, which produced first a servant, and then Rivers, his honest face a little shadowed, as it always was, by the foretaste of the classics.

"Put down your Virgil for awhile," said the tutor, a direction the young fellow obeyed with great alacrity; "I have got a word or two to say to you on a serious subject."

"Very good, sir," replied Rivers, with his frank smile. Though he troubled his "people," he rarely troubled himself; he had the light heart that goes all the way whithersoever it leads; "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," was his favourite proverb. Besides, he was so used to be bully-ragged, as he called it, upon the matter which, as he justly concluded, was in his tutor's mind, that it had no effect upon him whatever.

"I am sorry to hear, Rivers, that without giving any notice to your father you have a desire to leave us."

"I shall be very sorry to leave you, sir, very," he

answered, gently. It was curious how soft and low was this good-natured giant's voice, when his feelings were moved. "I shall have nothing but happy recollections of Leadon, whenever I leave it."

"I hope so; and let me tell you, Rivers, when you are in the Bush alone, and utterly without sympathetic companionship, you will feel the loss of those home ties which you are now preparing to sever with so light a heart. Horses, and dogs, and the open air are not all one needs in life, and notwithstanding you are apparently so careless of other things, I think you are not so cut out for solitude as you imagine yourself to be. It is possible you may want a wife some day, and in your exile you will not find it easy to find one."

"I don't think that will trouble me, sir," returned the young man, smiling, and with an unexpected flush (for he was no more given to blushing than to tears); there was also a twinkle in his eyes, which gave his words a double meaning, as though he might have added "and even if it did trouble me, the difficulty you speak of would not be insuperable." So strong indeed was the impression produced by his tone and manner, that Mr. Barton replied to it, rather than to his words.

"Of course you could find a wife of some sort; but if there is one thing more likely to wreck a life than another, it is to marry beneath one."

"Yes, sir."

And here again there was something in the young man's tone that was at war with his words; his reply—if it could be called such—was compliant, and that was all; there was a certain doggedness about it which certainly did not imply agreement; and again the tutor answered what he suspected to be in the other's thought.

"You must not imagine, Rivers, because you like

rough ways and open speech in men, that you will find them agreeable in the woman you marry. Though you despise the manners of those among whom you have been brought up, they have had a deeper effect on you than you perhaps believe; they are in your blood and your bone; you would resent vulgarity of disposition—such as is only too likely to belong to such a woman as you will have the choice of in an out-of-the-way region—at home, as much as any man I know. You may say you are not given to learning yourself, but the being ignorant is quite another thing from being illiterate; and in just the sort of knowledge—if it be but of life and manners—that you do possess, it is certain she will be deficient.”

“Indeed, sir,” replied Rivers, “I promise you when I marry it will not be such a person as you describe, but one that in those points you have mentioned, and I hope in others of more consequence, you will approve.”

“Well, that shows good intentions, at all events,” said the tutor, smiling; “and is such a long speech for you, my dear fellow, that one would have thought you had a bride from the Bush in your mind already. However, I hope you may never go there to look for her; and that reminds me that you have not yet answered my question, about your design to leave us at an early date. Your father writes that he has reason to believe that you have such an intention.”

“That is quite true, sir,” answered the young man, resolutely. “Of course, I shall be very sorry, very, to leave you and yours, sir, and shall never forget the kindness I have received at Leadon. I hope, whatever happens, you will judge me with charity, and, at least, never think me ungrateful. But the fact is, the longer

I live—I do not say here, but in England—the more I feel that I am out of place. I can never embrace the calling my father has mapped out for me—without knowing much of the country,” he added, smiling, “in which he is prospecting—and I feel I am losing my time and yours.”

“Well, Rivers, I really think I am as good a judge of that as you, and I do not think that you are. My time at all events is at your service, and I hope you know me well enough to believe that I say it from no selfish motive.”

“Indeed I do, sir,” the young man’s voice was husky, and it was plain that he was deeply moved.

“It would be a great pleasure to me, Rivers, if I could write to your father to say that I had persuaded you to reconsider your rash plans.”

“It gives me great pain, sir, for your sake to say ‘no,’ but my resolution is taken. I shall never see my father again.”

“Rivers! I am astonished at you! You grieve me beyond expression! Why should you not see your father? do you not mean even to wish him good-bye?”

“No, sir. What would be the good? we should only part in anger, of that I am certain. Perhaps, when I am gone, and after long years, he may think differently about me. You know what he thinks now; how should it be possible, in the very act of disobedience to his wishes, that he should say God speed to me; his language—to judge from experience—would be very different.”

“Have you had any quarrel with your father?”

“No particular one of late; but our life, as respects one another, is one long quarrel. I have thought of it very much, sir, and all round, and I can come to no

other conclusion than that I must go, and the sooner the better."

"I cannot certainly tell your father that, Rivers, but since you compel me to do so, I must write to him, and say my arguments are unavailing."

Mr. Barton pointed to the door, and the poor giant, with his Virgil under his arm, moved slowly towards it. "I am so sorry, sir," he said, as he reached it, "I am so truly sorry to have vexed you." And he was gone.

Mr. Barton was very much vexed. He had not had much hopes of that interview, but he had not expected to meet with such a complete defeat. What annoyed him more, however, was that Rivers should have made up his mind to emigrate, and at once, as it was clear he had done, without revealing the fact to him. It seemed to him, what he should certainly not have looked for in Rivers, an underhand proceeding. He had had pupils leave him at very short notice, and of their own heads as it were, but it was because they had done something disgraceful, which they did not wish to be disclosed till after they had left; but this of course was not the case in the present instance; their exits had offended but not distressed him; but now Mr. Barton was "hurt." However, there was nothing for it but to accept the inevitable, and he sat down, and wrote to Lord Ripton, as temperate and judicious an epistle as he could contrive; extenuating the young man's conduct as far as possible, but speaking of his resolution to emigrate as being final, and beyond his powers to combat.

Mr. Barton had thus had trouble with all three of his pupils within twenty-four hours, and the most with the one from whom he least expected it. He had

always thought Rivers would emigrate, and also that it was the best thing he could do; but he had not supposed that the bomb-shell which had alarmed Lord Ripton was to have burst so soon, and he felt rather bitterly that he himself ought to have received notice of the explosion. He had expected better things of Rivers.

In the evening of the day that had been so full of events in his quiet household another incident happened. As they all sat down to dinner, the news came to him, or rather a message—for in such cases the clergyman is always expected to be the man to act—that Bryce the carrier had been thrown from his cart almost at his own door, and badly injured. Every one expressed their sorrow; Mr. and Mrs. Barton rose together, but her husband insisted that she should finish her dinner. “Hannah, we may be sure, will do all that can be done, till the doctor comes; she is so sensible. He *has* been sent for, of course?” he inquired of the servant.

“No, sir, but I believe”—and he looked towards Leicester.

“Rivers has gone to the stables, and will ride my horse to Market Overt, sir; he said that would be the quickest way.”

“Indeed, it will; that was very sensible of him.”

“And so *like* him,” said Mrs. Barton.

“So unselfish,” exclaimed Clare; “and so prompt.”

Rose said nothing, but her heightened colour and sparkling eyes betrayed her admiration.

“Yes,” said Mr. Barton, putting on his coat and hat, which the man had brought in. “He is certainly very fit for the life he has taken such a fancy for; if it had been twenty miles instead of two, he would have been

equally ready." His conscience a little reproached him for the hard thoughts he had had in his mind that morning about Rivers.

"What a thing it is to have a horse, or rather to be able to ride!" whispered Avis mischievously into Leicester's ear. "There is nothing like your Centaur for getting a reputation with the ladies. There is no need for him to carry them off nowadays; they jump up behind."

"Why didn't *you* jump up and offer to take my bicycle?" retorted Leicester. "You have often said you can do two miles in five minutes."

"That is on the flat, my dear fellow. Of course I thought of it; but then there were the hills."

"I hope Mr. Rivers will not gallop down the hills," said Mrs. Barton, who had just caught the last word.

"Oh, but he will," observed Avis. "You see it is not *his* horse."

Clare bit her lip. She had a great sense of fun, and could never help laughing at Avis's cynicism; but the other two ladies were displeased. Between the accident that had happened and the accident that might happen, there was not, in their opinion, any room for a joke.

"I've put my foot in it again," said Avis to himself. "I am glad old Bart was not here to hear me."

If old Bart had heard him, he would probably not have paid much attention. He was a man who well knew when to be deaf, as it behooves a good tutor, above all men, to know. His mind, too, was just now full of more serious matters. The accident to the carrier, at his time of life, was only too likely to be serious; and, if anything happened to him, his granddaughter would be left without a protector, and a

greater responsibility to himself than ever. As he drew near the cottage, he found a knot of people discussing what had happened, to judge by their high tones, with more of interest than of sympathy. The carrier was popular with them, but so are accidents to most persons of their class. In village life, startling events of any kind are always welcome as a relief to dull monotony.

Mr. Barton wasted no time in putting questions, the replies to which he well knew would be long drawn out. The men parted to left and right with a pull of their forelocks, and he entered the cottage. There were four men in the lower room; they had helped to carry the hurt man upstairs, and had thus, as it were, paid their footing. They had a right to be within the play-house, even though they could not see the stage. "Hannah have turned we out of poor Bryce's room," one of them explained to Mr. Barton in answer to his look of inquiry, "so us can't tell ee much about it, sir. She says as he wants only two things till the doctor comes, air and water."

"Hannah is quite right, no doubt; but, in as few words as possible, just tell me what has happened."

"Well, sir, it was this way. Shipton's sow was lying in the road, and got up sudden like, which frightened the old mare. Bryce was a driving home at goodish speed, and she turned round, and out he came head first on to the middle of the pathway. Robin and George and Hathway here we picked un up, but he was almost a dead man, and——"

"Let us hope not so bad as that," interrupted Mr. Barton, as he moved as noiselessly as he could up the short flight of wooden stairs that led straight from the living room into the bedroom above it.

The old man had been put to bed, and was lying with his eyes closed, and a face of that ashen grey which is painted by a hand more relentless than that of age. To look at, he was "almost dead" already, as the man had said. The blood had been wiped from his face and temples, but a little still oozed from the wet bandage which Hannah was carefully applying to his broken forehead. Even under these sad circumstances, Mr. Barton could not help being struck by the exceeding beauty of the girl; it seemed to be heightened by the occupation wherein she was engaged, which lent an additional grace and tenderness to her exquisite features, and this, too, in spite of an expression which betokened not only extreme distress, but illness. The stroke of her grandfather's accident had been evidently too much for her; she was quite changed from the healthy and almost robust girl he had conversed with only a few hours ago. "We must get a nurse to help her through this business," was Mr. Barton's reflection.

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLE AT THE COTTAGE.

NOTWITHSTANDING her distressful appearance, Hannah narrated to Mr. Barton what had happened, with calmness and clearness, nor did her hand tremble as she continued to apply her simple palliatives to her patient. Only when she had finished her story, it was with a heartrending sigh that she inquired, "Oh, when, eh, when, sir, do you think that Dr. Greystone will be here?"

"If he was at home when the news reached him, he will be here almost immediately, my good girl; for Mr. Rivers has gone for him, on horseback. He jumped up from our dinner-table, when the tidings came, and was off at once."

"God bless him!" said Hannah; and in a still lower voice, something else Mr. Barton did not catch.

"Yes, he is a good-natured fellow, and respects your grandfather, as, indeed, we all do."

"What is it, sir?" inquired Hannah, pointing with a hand, that now trembled excessively, to the old man; "what do you think has happened to him that he mutters so strangely, and takes no notice?"

"I fear it is concussion of the brain—not that that is necessarily, or even generally, fatal—but your grandfather is a very old man. You could not have expected to have had him long with you, at all events."

"No, sir;" it was very plain she was greatly agitated; now that her work for the present was over—for the blood had ceased to flow—the tension of her mind was giving way; she sank on her knees by the bed, and sobbed most bitterly. It was natural enough, for the frail and aged form that lay there—and it was only too likely would never rise from it—was the only relative and protector, and he had been a very kind one, she possessed in the world.

"My poor girl; yours is a sad trial," said Mr. Barton, sympathetically; "but it should be a comfort to you to reflect that, as regards your conduct to him, you have nothing to reproach yourself with."

She shook her head impatiently, almost passionately, as though such a view of the case was intolerable.

"At such a time, of course," continued Mr. Barton, soothingly, "we are apt to exaggerate everything we

have done amiss, and everything we have left undone. But it is wrong to be too hard upon anybody, even upon ourselves. Your grandfather has often spoken to me about you, and always as regards your behaviour towards him, in the highest terms."

A sigh that was almost a groan, was the girl's only response; she lifted her eyes for a moment from the hand that covered them, and gazed upon the evening sky as though she sought forgiveness there, and sought in vain.

At that moment there came the clatter of a horse's hoofs at speed, followed by the noise of wheels. "There is Mr. Greystone, is it not?" she inquired, eagerly.

"Yes," returned Mr. Barton, looking through the window which commanded the garden gate, and consulting his watch.

"Mr. Rivers has brought him back with him; you have been fortunate, indeed, in his being at home, and also in your messenger."

He spoke out of a long experience of country life; the doctor is so rarely at home, and unless the person despatched for him has more intelligence than is usual, he finds a difficulty in getting at him. Now in matters of this kind Rivers was *facile princeps*; it was not the first nor the second time that he had fetched Mr. Greystone, and once from the bedside of a patient six miles away; the doctor, too, was slow in his movements, and no one but Rivers, as Mr. Barton felt, could have persuaded him—probably pushed him—into his gig in so incredibly short a time.

Mr. Greystone, however (for his physician's diploma had only been conferred on him by his neighbours), though old, was a sagacious man, and enjoyed with justice a high reputation. Though he had but one gig,

he had half a dozen horses, and did more work than half the people who in these days are so often described as dying of over-work. He thoroughly understood his clients, both rich and poor. He made the former pay for the latter as well as he could; and, whether that excellent plan succeeded or not, could never persuade himself to take a fee from those who could not afford it. He had a genial, pleasant face, bronzed by sun and wind, and, though lacking somewhat of the "bedside manner," which is so remunerative to fashionable physicians, had an air of cheerfulness (and, it might be added, of belief in himself) that inspired confidence always, and hope where hope was possible. Though, as has been said, slow in his movements (for which age and the rheumatism were answerable, rather than a natural disposition) his air was brisk and his look searching.

With a nod at Mr. Barton, and a glance of pity at Hannah, he walked straight up to the unconscious patient and made his examination. Presently he turned to the weeping girl. "Your grandfather feels no pain," he observed, soothingly; then, in answer to her look of pathetic inquiry, he added, "but, my child, I fear there is trouble in store for you."

"Don't you think, doctor, we had better have a nurse?" said Mr. Barton.

"Oh, pray let me nurse him myself," pleaded the girl.

Mr. Greystone looked at her with scrutinising eyes.

"Yes, you shall nurse him; but not at night. We must not burn the candle at both ends. I will send you a night nurse. When did this happen?"

"About an hour or so ago, sir."

"Umph! No time has been lost, at all events. If that young gentleman yonder," he pointed to the win-

dow, from which Rivers could be seen upon his still panting steed, "had ridden less quickly, he would have missed me for the evening. Go out and thank him; a breath of *fresh* air will do you good."

"Not to-day, sir. I had rather be here with grandfather," was the unexpected reply.

The doctor nodded, and gave her some directions about the patient.

"I will send over what is necessary with the nurse." Then he left the room with Mr. Barton.

"It is a bad business, I fear?" said the latter when they were alone on the stairs.

"Yes, concussion of the brain, with complications. He will not live."

"Poor Hannah!" exclaimed Mr. Barton.

"How long has that girl been looking so unwell?" asked the doctor, sharply.

"She was quite well this morning. Now you mention it, I think she has been looking—for her—rather more delicate of late."

"Umph! The shock, then, I suppose, has done it. But she is not, in my opinion, in a condition to do so much nursing. I'll look in to-morrow morning." Then, as they approached the gate, "There is your good wife, I see, Mr. Barton, coming up the street. She will do that poor girl good. When a woman is in trouble, she wants a woman to comfort her. Well, my young friend (to Rivers), I congratulate you on not having broken your neck. Hannah bade me thank you, but is too much upset to do so herself."

"Then I can't see poor Bryce, I suppose."

"Certainly not, he is quite unconscious." Then, in answer to the other's look of inquiry, "Yes, a bad case, I am sorry to say."

Rivers rode away with a grave face. "My pupil has a kind heart," said the tutor as the doctor climbed into his gig; he did not want to be delayed by a talk with Mrs. Barton, and had work to do in the other direction.

"Very much so," said the old doctor, drily. "It is unusual to find a young man of his class so interested in such a patient." He drove away with his lower lip a little projecting, a sign with him when his diagnosis of a patient was not clear.

"I don't like the look of that poor girl," he said to himself. "She comes of a healthy stock enough too; I'll just speak a word to Nurse Sherwood about her. *She'll* know."

Things went on at Leadon much as usual for many days, just as though there was no old man dying at the Well Cottage; but nevertheless the circumstance had its influence on more than one person in our story. The person who talked about it least was Rivers, to whom any mention of his rapid ride to Market Overt, though it had really been quite a feat of equestrianism, was hateful to him. In a case of life and death—though as it happened life was little concerned in it—why shouldn't a man ride fast? Of course Avis made jokes about it—"Never spare another man's horse" was a proverb he deduced from the event—but that Rivers cared little about; what he detested was the being praised for nothing at all. Mrs. Barton and Clare both spoke warmly about it, but it only made him shiver; and Rose's admiring silence was even worse. He was a hero even to his *valet de chambre*, if Mr. Barton's groom could be called so.

"Not another man in the county could have rode down Firtree Hill at a gallop as Master Rivers had been seen to do; old Styles acoming home across the Downs

had seen him, and thought he was being run away with, but not he; the 'oss didn't breathe as could run away with Mr. Rivers." A statement which in another clime, proved afterwards, on more than one occasion, incorrect.

Mrs. Barton or the girls went up to Well Cottage every day; there was no improvement in the old man, and Hannah, notwithstanding she had a nurse to help her, looked, they said, very sadly.

"I think, Mr. Rivers," said Mrs. Barton, "that you ought to go and see Hannah some day, it might cheer her up a little, and I am sure, though no good has unfortunately come of it, she has much to thank you for."

Rivers looked exquisitely uncomfortable, but said, "If you think so, Mrs. Barton, though I'm sure I don't know what *I* could do, I'll go."

"What luck the fellow has!" said Avis to Leicester afterwards. "I should like to comfort the poor girl immensely, but nobody asks me to do it. However, I'll drop a card."

As a matter of fact, all the young men had visited the cottage to make inquiries, but Hannah had not been visible. She seemed overwhelmed with sorrow at her poor grandfather's condition, which indeed, except that he did not suffer, was as bad as it could be. He lay with his eyes open, but there was no speculation in them; he could neither speak nor move, and the one satisfactory assurance the doctor could give her was, that he also could not feel. It is one of the inscrutable things of this inscrutable world, that its inhabitants from illness or accident often do lie in this comatose state for weeks, or even longer, until they die. They do not think, the doctors tell us, while in this condition; existence is main-

tained, though life—or all that is worthy of the name—has departed. One sometimes wonders whether the doctors are right. What, if all this time when we lie to all appearances like logs, the inward mind is busy, and with what thoughts? A terrible conjecture; but not so strange as that we should thus cumber the earth, and be an unconscious burthen to all about us. It is said, indeed, that this may be to develop their loyalty, their patience, their goodness—of course, it may be so; there is nothing that may not be on the mere ground that we see no sufficient reason for it, but the reason seems sometimes very short of sufficiency. Perhaps it was this question that troubled Hannah Bryce, that made her eyes so grave, and her face so pale, and her ears so deaf to what was said to her; for such was her condition not only when in her grandfather's sick room, but elsewhere and at all times. She went about, said that wise woman Nurse Sherwood, like a girl in a dream, and a very bad dream.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT ROSE SAW FROM THE ARBOUR.

OF the two Barton girls, Rose was the most constant in her ministrations among the poor. She did not feel so shy with them as in company with those of her own rank in life. The modest simplicity of her nature recommended her greatly to them. Clare's manner was simple, too, though very kind; but a little too simple as to directness. If she found things amiss, she said so, without any of that circumlocution of rebuke which

ill-doers generally prefer. When some idle slattern would complain to her that nothing in the way of remonstrance seemed to do her dirty children any good, she would reply brusquely, "Why do you never try soap and water—just for once, as an experiment?" These flights of satire either passed over the heads of those she addressed, or offended them, and made even her gifts less welcome. But Miss Rose, it was said, when she came into one's cottage, "did a body good."

She had not the heart to scold even a dirty body. It was a constant source of surprise to her that poor people were so clean as they were, or so patient, or so good. She felt that, if she was in their case, she would have been desperately wicked; though, in truth, she would have been nothing of the kind. From the point of view of "an example," indeed, it was quite a waste that Rose Barton had been placed in a position superior to them. She would have been the model girl of her village, though with not, perhaps, the intellectual gifts of the young person at present occupying that post, who was, of course, Hannah Bryce. The management of the clothing and coal clubs was in Mrs. Barton's hands, but the distribution of them fell to Rose, as Clare averred,—though with secret pleasure, for she was in reality as tender-hearted as her sister,—it was most shamefully misconducted. All kinds of undeserving persons got things, and the home subscription had to be increased in consequence. Some farmers who had waggons at their disposal would not send to the railway station for the coals, and Mrs. Barton told them what Providence thought of such hardness of heart, and Miss Clare told them to their faces—with an epigrammatic allusion to coals of fire—what *she* thought of them; but Miss Rose, bold for others, if shy and

shrinking for herself, would say a few words to them in her soft, pleading way, and sometimes get the coals.

With unwonted metaphor, Leicester had once compared the one sister to sunlight and the other to moonlight; and very uncomfortable Avis made him by threatening to repeat it.

"I don't think Miss Rose would like it," he said, "if she was to hear that you called her ministrations moonshine; and I must have your bicycle, mind, whenever I want it," which accordingly he did.

One evening, while the old carrier was still lingering, without speech or motion, on the brink of the dark river, Rose took her way to the Well Cottage. She had meant to pay an earlier visit, but the intense heat of the day had delayed her. The clouds were very threatening, and the sexton, who made the weather forecasts for Leadon, had told her there would be a thunder-storm. Some large drops of rain, indeed, were already falling, but with the idea in her mind that she had neglected a duty, this was a very small consideration with her, and, putting a light waterproof under her arm, she passed out by the back gate into the street. She had to walk but a little way,—though, as has been said, the cottage was the last in the village,—and yet, before she reached it, the rain came down in sheets and the gloom of the sky had changed to darkness, only relieved by vivid flashes of lightning.

She had reached the gate, and entered the garden, when a flash even more brilliant than its predecessors made everything for an instant as bright as day. She saw the well, and the little arbour that stood on one side of it, and the row of beehives on the other, as plain as though it were high noon; and she also saw in the porch of the cottage Richard Rivers and Hannah

Bryce; there was nothing—or very little—in that; he had probably called to ask after her grandfather, and was in the act of taking leave,—but he was kissing her. This was a circumstance not unprecedented, it may be said, and which might have happened to any girl, especially to one so beautiful; but that was not at all the view Rose Barton took of it. She flew into the little arbour, and covered her face with her hands, as if the sight had been a very shocking one indeed.

The arbour, intended for fine weather only, was very slightly built; indeed, it was chiefly constructed of empty packing cases, which had come into the carrier's hands in the course of business. Such a thunder-storm as was now commencing came through the roof almost as though it were a shower bath; but Rose did not put up the umbrella, which she had closed of necessity on entering the narrow doorway. She did not notice that she was getting wet through; the thunder rolled over her, peal on peal, but she scarcely heard it. From her youth up she had dreaded thunder, which she somehow associated with the wrath of heaven; but it did not alarm her now; the lightning flashed in zigzags and lit up earth and sky with its blinding radiance, but she heeded it not. It only served her to see the cottage on which her eyes were fixed in a sort of tearless agony; for in her heart of hearts she loved the man who, she now learnt for the first time, had given his love to another.

That he still delayed his departure while such a storm was raging was not to be wondered at; but it was dreadful to picture him there—with Hannah. If he had kissed her in the porch—from which they had been driven by the rain—he would presently kiss her again in the parlour. Rose seemed to see him do it, even

when she could scarcely see her hand before her ; she seemed to hear him do it, even when the thunder was at its loudest. Her heart sank within her—but it did not grow cold nor numb ; it felt every one of those imagined kisses as though it had been a blow. The light of her life—though she had carried it in secret, and unknown to every one—seemed to be going out, and when it was gone her future would be left in darkness.

But it was not quite gone. Her soul was as white as an angel's, but she had not lived twenty years in the world without becoming acquainted—if only by hearsay—with worldly ways. She had heard, or perhaps read, that a man's love was not like a woman's,—personal, monopolising, pure ; it was latitudinarian, and by comparison coarse. It varied also (though it was shocking that it should be so) with the variations of rank. Some pupils of her father's, for example, might think it no harm to chuck a housemaid under the chin, who would certainly not dream of taking that liberty with one of his daughters. Among the lower classes, kissing, she knew, was thought nothing of, between young people ; and that might excuse Hannah from her share in the transaction, though it did not exonerate Rivers.

But *did* it excuse Hannah ? Could she be said to have the ordinary traits and failings of her class ? Was she not too well educated, too refined, to take—even from a man in a higher position of life—a kiss as a compliment ? Rose confessed to herself, with a groan, that it was so ; that so far as Hannah was concerned, at all events, what she had beheld was not the result of a mere flirtation, but something more serious. Rivers, indeed, might only have pressed her lips from a momentary temptation, thinking no harm ; nay, of course

he thought no harm, but thinking that Hannah would take his doing so no more seriously than himself, an error born of his superior station, and common to his sex. This comforted Rose a little, but she did not conceal from herself for a moment that Hannah was beautiful enough to turn any man's head, whose heart had not been bespoken by another. And this, she also confessed, was not Rivers's case. He had given her intense pain, but, even if he had known she had been a witness of what had just occurred, he might have been ashamed of himself, but would have owed her no apology. The love that existed between them, she owned with a bitter sigh, was entirely one-sided. He had been kind and gentle with her, as he was to everybody; but he had no suspicion of the admiration she felt for his frankness of character, his unselfishness, his courage and independence, and even for his strength and hardihood. When a woman loves a man she loves him all and "all in all," including his weaknesses—with one exception, that of his weakness for the other sex. It was this serious obstacle which Rose Barton, after a long struggle with a sense of helplessness and despair, now set herself, poor little shivering soul, to get over. She hoped, and therefore she believed, that what she had seen was the result of a momentary impulse, to which a pure and noble nature had succumbed. If it should happen that heaven, which knew her sacred secret, answered her unspoken prayer, and made Rivers hers, he should never know what she had suffered this dreadful night; it should never suggest a jealous thought of him or arouse a doubt. Such was her harmless and pitiful dream.

The thunder had ceased to roll, and the lightning to flash, the ordinary hues of evening had begun to take

the place of the sullen clouds; she had just resolved to return home, when the two figures again appeared in the porch; there was a close embrace, a kiss as before—only it seemed, to judge by the drawn-out agony in her bosom, to last longer—and then Rivers ran down the garden path, through the still descending rain, and was gone.

To follow him was impossible to her; she would not have come across him, just then, for worlds. To account for her absence to her people, having performed nothing, would have been difficult, but that was not what moved her; she felt a sudden and overmastering desire to see Hannah, and by the girl's manner to judge for herself the nature of what had happened. Would she be jubilant, as one who had inspired with passion the man she loved; or would she be indifferent, as though nothing out of the way or uncommon had taken place? It was significant of the struggle between the feelings that agitated Rose, that she utterly forgot, for the moment, the cause for which she had set out to call at the cottage. The sick man was forgotten in his granddaughter. When she reached the porch which had been the scene of those tender farewells, the door that opened straight upon the house was open as though the night had been a fair one, and at the table in the centre Hannah was sitting with her bowed-down face in her hands, and her plentiful hair spread about it in all directions. At the sound of her approach she started up with her eyes streaming with tears, which she made no effort to sweep away. When woman meets woman each knows that such attempts are vain.

"How good of you to come and see me, Miss Rose, on such a night as this! But you are wet through!"

Rose might have replied that Hannah also was rather wet, but repartee was far from her thoughts; her hostess, notwithstanding her tears, was the less embarrassed of the two.

There was a fire in the room, notwithstanding the season, for the preparation of certain things for the sick man, and Hannah invited her visitor to sit by it.

"I have a waterproof, thank you," said Rose in a tone that she vainly endeavoured to render indifferent. "It did not rain at all when I started from home."

This was a foolish admission, for it naturally suggested that she must have stopped somewhere for shelter, though of a very inefficient kind, upon her road. What if Hannah should guess that it was in the arbour?

"Still, it was very kind of you to persevere. Mr. Rivers also has just been here, but then he is not liable to take cold; but doubtless you met him on your way."

"No, I did not meet him," said Rose, tremulously, conscious of her rising colour; "I took shelter on the road and missed him."

"He was weather-bound here for quite a long time," continued Hannah. "Mr. Leicester and Mr. Avis were also so good as to call to-day, and as for your own people and yourself, Miss Rose, I can never forget your kindness. I only wish dear grandfather could be made aware of it."

"He is still, then, in the same sad condition, poor man?"

"Just the same; only the doctor says he is much weaker. He is dying;" and, despite the efforts she evidently made to control them, the girl's tears began to flow afresh.

Rose's kind heart was touched. In Hannah's distressful state of mind, it was only natural that all other things, save that which was paining it, should seem of small account. She might have accepted Rivers's tenderness—though it certainly was of a very demonstrative and even objectionable nature—as mere sympathy, for which perhaps it was intended.

"I hope you like the nurse," said Rose. "Dr. Grey-stone gives her an excellent character."

"She is well enough, and very attentive," said Hannah; "only," and here she smiled a wintry smile, "she seems to think that I want looking after as well as grandfather. She is a little fussy, but that I suppose is natural to her class."

"But you do want looking after, Hannah; this prolonged trial is telling upon you, I can see."

"I am quite well, thank you," said Hannah, drily, almost defiantly. "One can hardly be expected to be in good spirits. If *your* father, which Heaven forbid, were dying, Miss Rose, and you had no mother, and no sister, and no anybody——"

"Don't say that, don't say that, dear," interrupted Rose, tenderly; "and do try not to fret so."

"I do try, oh I do try," murmured the girl; but, even while she said it, her head fell forward into her hands, as it had done before, and she sobbed as though her heart would break.

Rose drew her chair close beside her, and put her arms round her waist (as Rivers had done), and, moving her hands away very gently, kissed her on the cheek (as Rivers had done), without a thought of Rivers, but only of an orphan and unprotected girl whom it was her duty, and also her pleasure, to comfort.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. GIDEON GILES.

THE Reverend Gideon Giles, rector of Market Overt, one of the best livings in the kingdom, had a modest name and a modest nature. The latter was very creditable to him, for, independently of the possession of so great a benefice, he was secretly conscious of that of high birth, though it was only on one side. Dukes and others think it a fine thing to have sprung from similar indirect relationship with royalty, and it seems only in consonance with this feeling that persons similarly descended from dukes should, in their degree, be proportionately proud of their genealogy; only, in both cases, it is better for a generation or two to have passed by before one begins to make a boast of it. This was the reason why Mr. Giles never even so much as whispered it to anybody that he was the son of a duke; but on the other hand, he was well pleased to have other people whispering it. He would not have been so pleased, perhaps, if he had named the reason they gave for this belief, namely, that when a person of very small intellectual calibre, and still less spiritual endowments, has a living of three thousand a year given him, he must be a duke's son, at the very least. Whether it was really so or not, the whole neighbourhood believed it, and respected Mr. Giles accordingly. They did not think it necessary to look to him for any higher—or rather any other, for how could there be any higher (?)—endowments; which, under the circumstances, was

fortunate. Nor did he pretend to such unnecessary distinctions himself. He did not preach well, though his discourses themselves were excellent, and borrowed from the most orthodox theologians; he had no turn for public speaking, and was rather alarmed even when addressing his school children; his manners were shy, and his appearance the reverse of what is understood, upon the stage at least (which was all his neighbours had to go by), as ducal. His coronet was red and a little worn; in other words, though not thirty-five years of age, he was prematurely bald, and what hair he had retained was flame-coloured. His hands, which were very large, were in harmony with this hue; and black, which being orthodox was, of course, his only wear, did not become his complexion. In stature he was what novelists, if speaking of their hero, would call "somewhat below the middle height," and, as a matter of fact, he was but five feet high. Still, for all these disadvantages, Mr. Gideon Giles was not a bad fellow. Though conventional he was not unkind, and though rich he was liberal.

Mr. Barton had nothing in common with him, but he pitied his shyness, and to say truth, his incapacity, and had helped him out of more than one social difficulty, for which the other was genuinely grateful.

"If I had only Barton's manners, and knowledge of the world!" he would often sigh to himself, after having "put his foot in it" at some local function; but his envy of his brother parson begat no enmity in him. He was as frequent a visitor at Leadon Rectory as his shyness would permit him to be, but he had sufficient intelligence to perceive that his welcome, though he was always treated with politeness, was not a warm one. He disliked the pupils, not so much because they

took very little trouble to make themselves agreeable, as because of the unfavourable contrast, as he could not but feel, their appearance presented to his own. They were so much younger and better looking; and though he thought Mr. Avis's manners were scarcely those of a gentleman, he envied him his freedom from *mauvaise honte*. He did not absolutely dislike Leicester, but Rivers he abhorred. It was monstrous that a fellow who had quarrelled with his family, if he had not absolutely disgraced himself in their eyes, and who had no property of his own to speak of, should give himself such airs. As a matter of fact, Rivers gave himself no airs, but he did not "take to" Mr. Giles at all, and, without any intention of being rude, ignored his existence. This, under the circumstances, was a monstrous and appalling thing enough, but he was guilty—or he thought him guilty—of an even more serious offence; Mr. Giles imagined that the young man entertained a tenderness for Clare Barton, and Clare he had marked for his own.

It would be a great sacrifice for one in his position, a great good fortune for her, and yet, such was his shyness that he could not muster up courage to make his offer. For the same reason he feared that he had failed to suggest to her his desire to make it, or else of course, her behaviour to Rivers would have been very different. She did not, it is true, seem absolutely to give him encouragement, but she showed, he thought, a greater liking for him than for the others. She had spoken admiringly of that ridiculous ride of his to Market Overt to fetch the doctor for the carrier—a matter of very little importance to anybody who *was* anybody, and far less as it regarded only a great hulking fellow who had no ideas beyond a horse and a gun. It was curious that Mr. Giles should have thus dis-

paraged Rivers's stature, for with that strange state which so often belongs to men of small size, it was Clare's magnificent proportions that had attracted him; but, as he got to know her, he had really fallen in love with her as far as his nature permitted him to fall. None had perceived this except Mrs. Barton, whose maternal eye had detected certain signs in him, though not very attractive ones, for they had chiefly exhibited themselves in an increase of awkwardness in her daughter's presence and dumbness in her society. It had given her more pain than pleasure, for though, as usual, she thought as well of her neighbour as it was possible to do, she did not think him worthy of Clare, and had a full conviction that she would refuse him; still, he was one of the best matches in the county, and good Mrs. Barton after all was human, and a mother.

Though thus debarred by his natural modesty from visiting much at his neighbour and fellow cleric's house, Mr. Giles took every opportunity—and in Bleakshire they were few enough—of meeting the family, and especially Clare, elsewhere. If there was a garden party, or a tennis party, or a bazaar held for charitable purposes, within ten miles of Market Overt, Mr. Giles made a point of being present, on the chance of beholding his adored one, and of saying half-a dozen words to her, though of the most commonplace kind. Modest as he was, he was not quite modest enough to understand that his presence did not make matters better for him, but rather the reverse; that his prospects might have been less gloomy had he confined himself to sending the family presents of grapes and peaches from his hot-houses, and thereby reminding them that he had more fruit under glass—which is not a bad index of

financial prosperity—than any bachelor in the county. At lawn tennis Mr. Giles did not shine, or rather he *did* shine; got very unbecomingly hot, and missed the easiest balls in the most ungraceful manner. Where he came out to the best advantage was at bazaars, where he was easily persuaded to buy everything at extravagant prices and instantly to give them away again; only, unfortunately, Clare was not much addicted to bazaars, and left her mother and sister to patronise those philanthropic, but rather insipid, institutions. It was a terrible reflection to Mr. Giles that while he was purchasing dolls' houses and kettle-holders, Clare might be taking a "stretcher" over the Downs with his hated rival.

His best and indeed certain chance of meeting her was at Leadon Hall, the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Jermyn, a couple brimming over with kindness, but to whom cruel Fortune had denied issue. Though far from rich, they belonged to one of the oldest families in Bleakshire, and were greatly respected. They were themselves old-fashioned, and though they permitted their grand old bowling-green to be defiled by croquet, they drew the line at lawn tennis, for which the rector of Market Overt blessed them. He did not play croquet well, but he cut a better figure at it than at the more modern game, and above all Mr. Rivers did not play it. He said that nobody was a good croquet player that did not cheat, which was doubtless only a confession of his inability to master the science. Though the twin souls of hospitality, the Master and Mistress of the Hall did not see much company on a large scale, preferring to entertain their friends at luncheon or dinner, and therefore when one morning Mr. Giles received an invitation from them to a garden party, his

heart leapt up for joy within him. Perhaps on that festal day he might screw up his courage to the sticking place, and learn his fate from Clare's own sweet lips.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE CROQUET GROUND.

THE old bowling-green at Leadon Hall was one of the few picturesque spots in that part of Bleakshire; protected from the north and east by the sloping hill called "The Butt," it had on the south a fine fringe of elm trees, through which ran a secluded path, termed "The Lovers' Walk;" on the west stood the Hall, from which it was separated by a sunk fence, or haw-haw, on which was built a rustic bridge. Jermyns had played bowls there for hundred of years, without much concerning themselves about the rolling of the ball of state, or what rubbers this or that political party met with; indeed, of a village in the neighbourhood of Leadon, and a little more remote, it is written that throughout the great civil war its inhabitants were entirely ignorant of its occurrence, and could not understand, when they were told of Charles the II.'s accession to the throne, why it was called a Restoration.

The present Mr. Jermyn did not take much more interest in politics than they did, though he had better information as to what was going on; he thought Whigs and Tories a foolish division of the human race, because it tended to destroy good fellowship in the county; and though a very strong economist in theory—having once waded through Mr. Mill's works during

an unusually prolonged fit of the gout—he employed all the cripples in the parish at the same rate of wages as the sound, and administered charity with the same secrecy and lavishness that candidates for Parliament use for doubtful voters. For the first crime he got into hot water with the farmers, and for the second, when she observed or discovered it, with his wife; and it was a bond between the old Squire and Rose Barton, that they often fell under the same condemnation.

“You and I have got into another scrape together, Miss Rose,” he would say, with the drollest look in his eye. “I hope your father has not cut off your allowance, as Mrs. Jermyn has my pocket money.”

“I believe, if she has, Mr. Jermyn, that she will spend it exactly in the same way herself,” would be Rose’s reply; for Mrs. Jermyn was almost as great a favourite with her as her husband, and at heart, as she well knew, as kind.

“That is very likely; my wife is a most consummate hypocrite; whereas you and I are always being found out.”

It was pretty to see the liking that existed between the stout old Squire and this delicate young girl, in whom one could have imagined nothing in common with him. “If I had only met your daughter earlier, my dear Mrs. Barton,” he would say, “that is about five-and-forty years ago, what a love match we might have made.”

Clare used bitterly to complain to Mrs. Jermyn that the Squire always flirted with her sister and never with her.

“That is only his guile,” the kind old lady would reply, her stout frame agitated with merriment, as it well might be, at this preposterous imputation on her

consort ; "in reality he adores you, quite as much as you know who."

If Clare knew, her face did not record the knowledge, which rather disappointed Mrs. Jermyn, who was a confirmed matchmaker, and had, in her mind, already disposed of Clare to several imaginary suitors. At present she thought Mr. Rivers was likely to prove the happy man, and resented it extremely, for, though she liked the young fellow, she objected to Clare being taken out of the country. As to ways and means, the state of a man's income, or the wishes of his family, they never so much as entered into the good lady's calculations ; she was all for the union of hearts. But for this view of the matrimonial question she would hardly have been blind to the motive which caused the rector of Market Overt always to accept her invitations with such enthusiasm, for he never seemed to enjoy himself much ; but the fact was he was no great favourite of hers ; his pretence of good birth, as compared with that of the Jermyns, seemed to her not only ridiculous, but wicked, and that such a miserable little creature (as she termed him in her private mind) should venture to lift his eyes to such a daughter of the gods as her favourite Clare, appeared impossible.

To the garden party, of which mention has been made, Mr. Giles came as usual the earliest guest, unwilling to lose a moment of his beloved's company, and Mrs. Jermyn received him with her usual sunny smile of welcome ; but she found it even harder work than usual to make conversation with him. He was as shy as ever, notwithstanding their long acquaintance, and even more distrait ; the spectacle of his hostess, though there was a great deal of her, did not seem to satisfy him ; his eyes, which were very unlike the eagles as

regarded their endurance of the sun, blinked nervously about the green, on which the gay croquet balls were set in order, and the tables, with their snowy linen and bright silver and pyramids of strawberries, were already laid out. He was looking for something brighter and better than all these, and even when Mr. Jermyn joined them, with beaming face and glowing cheroot, the void still remained unsupplied.

"You have heard the bad news from the Rectory, Mr. Giles, I suppose," said Mrs. Jermyn.

"Bad news? Dear me, no." Mr. Giles here exhibited an agitation that surprised his hostess and gave her a better opinion of him than she had hitherto entertained.

"We are going to lose Mr. Rivers. He has decided to emigrate almost at once."

"Dear me," said Mr. Giles, in a tone of much relief. "Well, he's been a long time making up his mind about it."

If his tone had been indifferent on such a matter, it would have displeased his hostess, but being obviously cheerful, it annoyed her. "This dreadful little man is jealous of the poor young fellow," was the thought that flashed upon her; but even then she did not suspect him of the feelings of a rival; she thought him envious of Rivers's thews and sinews, and comely looks. "For my part" she answered quickly, "I wish he had never come to such a conclusion at all. We shall miss him very much."

"Such fine fellows shouldn't be allowed to leave the country," said Mr. Jermyn; "they should be pressed for the volunteers."

"But I am thinking of ourselves, in Leadon," continued Mrs. Jermyn; "Mr. Rivers is a favourite with

rich and poor. There was his riding over to your place, Mr. Giles, for the doctor, for stance—though I am afraid it was to little purpose, for poor old Bryce is almost at his last gasp, I hear—what a good-natured thing that was.”

“Pity he hadn’t broken his neck,” thought Mr. Giles, but he only nodded adhesion.

“A wholesome young fellow, with no vice about him,” observed Mr. Jermyn; “I wish all our young sprigs of aristocracy—and some of the old trees also, for that matter—were like him.”

Mr. Giles bowed again, scarcely in adhesion. From any other mouth than that of his host such sentiments would have appeared downright revolutionary; they had no sort of personal application for him, but even Mr. Jermyn, noting his grave face, conceived that they had had, and became scarlet with indignation against himself.

“Rivers doesn’t play croquet, I think,” said Mr. Giles, not disparagingly, but rather the reverse, which Mrs. Jermyn, who observed her husband’s fears, thought under the circumstances “rather nice” of him.

“He does not care for it, but, as this is probably our last garden party he will have the chance of being present at, he has promised to be here to-day.—Ah, here is the Rectory party,” and through the garden, and over the bridge, came the Barton family, and the three pupils, the latter, it must be confessed, with not much expectation of enjoyment in their faces. Mrs. Jermyn perceived it, and in her quick straightforward way at once put them at their ease. “You needn’t look so glum, young gentlemen, you are not going to be bored to death as you were last time, when Lady Fineairs was here, and smoking was prohibited; my husband,

you see," and she pointed to his cheroot, "has already made his 'Declaration of Independence.'"

The young gentlemen all protested that tobacco was not a necessity of their existence, but the barometer of their expressions went up considerably at the announcement, nevertheless; the news that "dear Lady Fineairs" had been obliged to decline her hostess's invitation at the last moment in consequence of a sore throat was received by them with suppressed rapture. More and more guests came trooping in, and the bowling-green soon began to present what was subsequently described in the local newspaper, by one who had not been present, as "an animated appearance."

The croquet-players, though as usual not so numerous as the strawberry-and-cream eaters, made up two parties; one was a large one, composed of heterogeneous materials, at which Miss Clare metaphorically (for practically the thing was impossible, the feature in question being a beautiful aquiline) turned up her nose. The set of four which Mrs. Jermyn composed for her was not much more scientific, but then, as she said, "she knew the worst of them." It consisted of herself and her sister, Mr. Giles, and Rivers; the last-named seldom played the game, which had caused Mr. Giles to jump to the false conclusion that he couldn't play it, but Clare knew better. He did not care for croquet, but now that he was going away from the Bartons he was ready to do anything so long as it was in their company. It was noticed by his hostess that he was not in good spirits, which she naturally ascribed to the thought of parting from Clare; and, with her usual good nature, she recruited him at once, that "the two poor young things" might be thrown together. What rather surprised her, and delighted Mr. Giles, was that

the girl chose the latter for her partner; her sole reason, in fact, was that this arrangement made the better "side," since she was, she thought, almost as much the better player than her sister as Rivers excelled them both. In this, however, as the event proved, she was mistaken.

Mr. Giles, as has been said, was always a very indifferent hand with the mallet; but, on the present occasion, his nerves were shattered by the honour which had been thrust upon him, and his endeavours to signalise himself in his charmer's eyes mostly ended in disaster. Clare coached him through a hoop or two, but when she gave him any directions to be particularly attended to, such as "Remain close to me" (an invitation which made him almost delirious), it was always a failure. On these occasions she rebuked him without mercy, and, what was worse, Rivers always laughed.

On the other hand, Rose derived an exquisite pleasure from being "coached" by Rivers. She had never before been placed in such familiar relations with him; the protection that he naturally extended to her as his partner and the weaker player, seemed to her to have a more tender signification. Though always kind, he had never before taken such a particular interest in her, as, indeed, the game demanded. She forgave, and almost forgot, that indiscretion of his she had witnessed in the porch of the Well Cottage, and felt sure he meant nothing by it. How nice and gentle and kind he was, and what a tender interest he took in her stroke; it was not possible that such a feeling could be aroused by a mere partnership at croquet. It was true that no other partnership was in the least likely to take place between them—in a week or two he would

have sailed for Canada; but for the moment she had shut her pretty eyes to this distressing fact, and was in Paradise.

After the first game there was an interval. The party broke into little groups, and strolled about. This was the happiest time for at least two members of it, for Mr. Giles found himself in the Lovers' Walk with Clare, and Rose found herself there with Rivers. What the rector said is of little consequence; it was certainly not what in the morning he had intended to say—he had not the pluck for it. It was joy sufficient for him that he was moving side by side with Clare, touching, where the path grew narrow, her magnificent arm with his shoulder (for he was five inches shorter even with his high boots), and listening to her somewhat conventional remarks as if they were the utterances of the early gods.

Nor did Rivers say much worthy of record; but he did speak of his approaching departure with genuine regret, and when Rose spoke of it, too, with breaking voice, he answered cheerfully that, after all, he might not be so long away, and that the first visit on his return would be to Leadon, where he had spent so many happy hours and left such dear friends behind him; and, seeing she was moved, he had looked at her as he said so with a tenderness—well, one cannot say a tenderness that could not be mistaken, for, alas, it *was* mistaken, but with genuine feeling. It was the happiest moment of Rose Barton's life. Then they all went back to the croquet ground, and began a new game.

Presently, under Clare's instructions, Mr. Giles made a shot at Rose's ball. It was pretty close to him, and required a good deal of dexterity—almost of genius—

to miss it. But Mr. Giles knew his powers, or rather the want of them, and took as great pains as a candidate for the Queen's prize to get a bull's-eye at Bisley. Like him, he lay down (to the intense amusement of the others), and measured the distance with half-shut eyes. Then he took his mallet, and, with a mixture of agony and determination in his face, made cautious feints at it, and struck his ball the third time very wide of the mark. What was still worse, he placed it in close contiguity to Rivers's ball. "Tried to croquet you, Miss Rose, did he?" whispered that young gentleman in her blushing ear, "*I'll hammer him.*" How nice it was that he should feel so eager for vengeance on her account! He did hammer him, and to such a distance that it would possibly have taken him a couple of strokes to return to the hoops. Only he never did return to them.

There was suddenly a drawing together of the Leadon folks, the host and hostess. Mr. and Mrs. Barton and others, and an indefinable sensation of "something having happened" began to pervade the party. In answer to inquiries, however, Mr. Jermyn replied that it was only an occurrence in the village of local interest, so that everyone resumed their occupation, either as player or spectator. Everyone—that is, except the Barton girls, who naturally left their game for a moment to hear the news. The news, though sad, was only what had long been expected—the old carrier, Bryce, was dead at last. Indeed, at that very moment the tolling of the church bell, which in old-fashioned Leadon announced such matters, was heard above the croquet ground. It was in strange want of harmony with the click of the balls and the laughter of the players, but no one gave much attention to it. Mr.

Giles, who was very familiar with church bells, paid none at all, but was making scientific feints at his ball in anticipation of when it should be his turn to regain his position. Then the girls came back, though with grave faces, and Rose observed, "It is Mr. Rivers's stroke; where is he?" A stout lady who was eating strawberries and cream at the refreshment table (her third descent upon it) turned round, and laughingly replied to her question,—

"He is gone down the Lovers' Walk. I saw him throw down his mallet and start off at a great rate. By the expression of his countenance I thought he had lost the game." If the speaker could have spared a moment from her strawberries to look at Rose Barton, she might have added that his partner also looked as if the game was lost. She felt convinced that Rivers had gone to the Well Cottage.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH SOME PEOPLE ARE EMBARRASSED.

MR. BARTON was sincerely grieved at the death of the old carrier, but on that particular afternoon when the sad news was told him, he had, on the other hand, received certain cheering information that had come by post that morning, and which in fact was at that moment in his breast pocket. He had had an application from two persons of position, with respect to placing their sons under his charge; for the one he was indebted to Mr. Puddock, and for the other to Sir Innes Leicester. They came in the nick of time—just as

Rivers was about to leave him—and on other accounts were very welcome. For notwithstanding the large sums he received for his pupils, the tutor had put by little for a rainy day, and he was conscious of not being so young as he used to be. He was liberal, not to say lavish, in his expenditure, and had he not had a wise and judicious manager of domestic affairs in his wife, would have been in a far worse position than he was. Though accustomed to poverty in his youth, he had never known it since he had left college; in that far back time he had thought little of it, but he feared—now that he had given hostages to Fortune—the becoming re-acquainted with it; and he reproached himself with not having taken greater precaution against such a possibility; for, if it happened, it would be no longer an inconvenience but a catastrophe, and it might happen any day, through his own ill-health, or through a falling off in his popularity with his patrons. Many men were in a like position, in some respects, but if Mr. Barton's work failed him, he had no other calling to fall back upon, not even that unpromising suggestion of "writing for the reviews," which seems always to occur to persons of culture when in difficulties. He had sense enough to know that such work was not in his line, and that mediocre translations from Horace (which was all that he could compose in the literary way) were not saleable commodities. Therefore, this double-barrelled proof of the vitality of his reputation cheered him greatly. Henceforward he resolved to curtail his expenditure, and create that nest egg for his family which ought to have been laid long before.

It was characteristic of him that with this idea was mingled that of paying the old carrier's funeral ex-

penses, in case his granddaughter should have been left ill provided for. Since good fortune had befallen him, it seemed only right that he should share the gift with one who stood still more in need of it.

In this view, as he found on consultation with her, his wife agreed with him; she was as open-handed, though not so careless-handed, as himself, nor, though her mind was much more practical, did she regard the future with much more apprehension. This was strange, considering that despite her gentleness she had much common sense, but the cause of it lay in her loyalty to her husband; to have considered that the little savings he annually put by were utterly insufficient for their future needs, would be to reproach her husband with extravagance. To do this—though she had reasoned with him about this and that unnecessary expenditure as it had cropped up—she could not bring herself. Dear John could hardly do wrong; after all, men understood money matters better than women; Providence, that had been so much kinder to them than they could have hoped for in the past, would provide for them in the future. Thus she reasoned, or rather argued in despite of reason. But as for this particular matter of paying for old Bryce's funeral, she felt confident that no such outlay would be necessary, for that Hannah would, for one in her position of life, be left fairly off.

This indeed turned out to be the case. That very evening, as it happened, Mrs. Barton received assurance of it. She had gone up to the Well Cottage to administer what she could of comfort to the now twice orphaned girl, and finding her looking not only distressed and pale, but, as it struck her, frightened, ascribed it to the presence of Death in the house. Touched with pity for her loneliness, she made a proposition,

which, had she had time to think about, she would perhaps not have made. "If you do not like sleeping here, Hannah, while—that is, just now—we can give you a bed at the Rectory, for a night or two."

"Oh no, oh no," ejaculated the girl, vehemently, and with a voice almost of repulsion. "I could not go there."

Mrs. Barton stared at her with amazement. It was only when Hannah added in quite another tone, "You see, ma'am, I could not leave *him*," and glanced up at the curtained window, "so long as it was possible to be with him," that she understood the sentiment which had caused the outburst, and even then felt some surprise at it. For Hannah, though much attached to her grandfather, was not, she thought, a girl to harbour that sort of passionate devotion.

"Well, you will do as you please as to that, Hannah," she said, with as much indifference as she could assume, for it was evident that the girl required calming down rather than sympathy; "but you must not give way, nor go into the room, except for a little while; it would only do you harm, and him no good, remember. And Mrs. Sherwood will stay on, of course, so that you will not be alone."

"I am not afraid of being left, ma'am," was the quiet reply.

"But it would not be right, Hannah, neither now nor afterwards. You are too young and too pretty to keep house by yourself. Moreover, as regards the future, it is hardly likely that you will be able to afford to live on at the Well Cottage."

"That is true, ma'am; it must be sold, grandfather told me, for, as you know, it was his own property; he thought, with one thing and another, I should be worth three hundred pounds at least."

It was a curious speech for the girl to make under the circumstances, though the words "I should be worth" were obviously not her own. Mrs. Barton was well acquainted with the cool and calculating manner in which the poor, through no want of feeling, will speak of their own affairs under the most recent bereavement; but Hannah Bryce was so far above her class, both in education and delicacy of feeling, that in her mouth it sounded strange. It seemed as though she had at one time been making inquiries of her grandfather as to her future position, for he had not been a man likely to volunteer such information.

The dinner at the Rectory that night had been postponed, and changed to supper on account of the festivities at the Hall, and when the servant had withdrawn, Mrs. Barton spoke of her interview with Hannah, though one may be sure without imputing anything to her discredit; that was not Mrs. Barton's way of dealing with her fellow-creatures; "their worst she kept, their best she gave" to the general ear.

"I thought the poor girl looking ill, though if possible prettier than ever, but very resolute and quiet."

"She must have foreseen what has happened for some time, and has doubtless made up her mind to it, and perhaps even as to what course she would take when she would be left alone," observed Mr. Barton; "it will be a little difficult for her."

"Just so; I ventured to hint at the impossibility of her continuing to live alone at the Well Cottage, in which she quite agreed. It has been left to her, of course, and her grandfather advised her to sell it."

"I think the Squire may buy it," said Mr. Barton; "he was saying he wanted a cottage for his new bailiff. But where is Hannah to go?"

"I did not discuss that," said Mrs. Barton, "but I fancy she has made up her mind upon that subject. She gave me that impression."

"I hope you said nothing about her leaving Leadon," observed Mr. Barton; "she would be a great loss to us, and one is enough for us at a time," and he looked at Rivers with a quiet smile, but one that had genuine regret in it.

Rivers answered nothing, but turned scarlet, and pursued with abnormal interest the last strawberry on his plate with his spoon.

Rose, on the other hand, turned as white as the sugar. Like her mother, Rivers, too, she reflected, had doubtless had his interview with Hannah, and comforted her in her trouble after his fashion.

"I should not be the least surprised," observed Avis, "if Miss Bryce, on finding herself an heiress, were to set up in business on her own account a thousand miles away."

"I don't understand what you mean, Avis," said Mr. Barton, drily, almost harshly.

"Well, sir, I mean emigrate—like Rivers—and become a school-marm in America or elsewhere. She looks to me as if she had a great deal of ambition."

"I had no idea you were such a physiognomist, Mr. Avis," said Clare. "We must be careful how we look."

It was at the tip of Avis's tongue to say, "You are very careful how *you* look," in allusion to Miss Clare's always well-chosen array, but he fortunately subdued the inclination.

"You are not aware, perhaps," said Leicester, "that Avis prides himself on his knowledge of character. If he is ever driven to make his own living, which we all

hope will not be the case, he thinks he could do it by fortune-telling."

It was seldom that Leicester offered any remark in the family circle, and least of all a satirical one, but the temptation of paying off Avis for his many expressions of advice, and his affectation of superior wisdom, had proved too much for him.

There was a general laugh at the picture of Mr. Avis as a fortune-teller, in which that gentleman did not join; nor did Rose, nor did Rivers, for neither of them were in a laughing mood.

"Well, we shall see what we shall see when Miss Bryce comes in for her own," said Avis, doggedly.

"I hope we shall still see her in the school-room," said Leicester, "for she would be missed very much there."

"That's two words for yourself and one for the parish," remarked Avis.

" ' Oh, Hannah dear, that you were here,
With your bright eyes dancing clear,'

is what you would be saying, with Shelley, if she went away."

"I should be saying nothing of the kind," exclaimed Leicester, with indignation; and in the merriment that followed that absurd disclaimer Avis had his revenge.

Again the general smile was unreflected on the faces of Rose and Rivers; though unremarked at the time, it was afterwards recalled to mind that not one word had passed the lips of either of them during the discussion. If they had nothing to say, however, it was not because they had nothing to think about.

CHAPTER XV.

DISGRACE.

FUNERALS in country places are generally better attended than in town ; possibly because gratuitous entertainments of any kind are so much rarer, and partly because the deceased is more generally known. Everybody at Leadon, and indeed for miles around it, had known old Bryce, and hence there was a very large attendance. The ceremony, as usual in rural parishes, was held upon a Sunday, and the whole Rectory party came to it, including the three pupils, as an act of respect. This was hardly, perhaps, Mr. Avis's motive ; funerals, as he privately confessed, were "not much in his way, but when there was anything going on he liked to be in it."

Hannah, of course, was there, white as Mr. Barton's surplice, but with a firm and tearless face. As she stood by the graveside, to see the last of her only relative, Mrs. Barton instinctively moved to one side of her and Clare to the other, as though to show that she was not at least without friends. At the same moment Rivers took his place beside Clare, an act which was more remarked upon by the villagers than the other. It had always seemed to them that Mr. Rivers and Miss Clare "were, as you might say, cut out for one another," and the news of the former's almost immediate departure for "furrin parts," by which they vaguely designated Canada, had not yet reached them. These two therefore divided the attention which would otherwise have

been concentrated on the chief mourner; but, in any case, the change in Hannah's general appearance would probably have escaped them. She was looking ill and careworn, beyond what might have been expected from the trial to which she had been so lately subjected, but what had been lost in the way of health was more than compensated for, so far as appearances went, by an unaccustomed air of delicacy and refinement. Her beauty had never been of a vulgar type, but the traces of recent sorrow, and also perhaps the black attire she wore, softened and idealised it in a high degree. Any stranger capable of observing social distinctions would have said there were *three* ladies standing beside Bryce's grave. The circumstance did not, we may be sure, escape the notice of the real ones. There are no surroundings, however sad and sombre, which can render the eye of a female, even with a tear in it, blind to appearances in one of her own sex. When after the funeral the serious part of the matter had been duly discussed, "How lovely," observed Mrs. Barton, "poor Hannah was looking!"

"Yes," said Clare, "and how ladylike! Black becomes her as admirably as colours, and also gives her refinement; but I thought her looking very ill."

"I thought so, too, though indeed it is not much to be wondered at; we must try to get her away for a change somewhere. I spoke to her about it a day or two ago, but she seemed strangely averse to it. Of course there will be some difficulty apart from her disinclination. I mentioned Mrs. Sherwood as being a fit person to accompany her, but I don't think she has taken to Mrs. Sherwood. I think we must get you, Rose, to talk to her, for you seem to have a talent for persuading our people to do anything you please."

"Oh, Mamma, not I," said Rose, looking up with a scarlet face, and the tears very near her eyes. "I have no influence—indeed I had rather not interfere with Hannah."

"You have tackled much more formidable people," said Clare, "and got the better of them, too. Farmer Groves, for instance, wouldn't send for the coal last winter till your eloquence was brought to bear upon him; I don't know what you said to that gay old widower, but my impression is you held out some delusive hopes."

"My dear Clare," said Mrs. Barton, rebukefully, "you should not say such things even in fun."

It was her habit, and for that matter Clare's also, to think of Rose as almost a child, and to avoid talking of certain matters of the parish in her presence about which she freely, and almost of necessity, conversed with her elder daughter.

"Here is Dr. Greystone," observed Rose, indifferently; she was standing at the window, thinking of things that would have surprised her mother and sister a good deal if they could have got at the back of her mind, when she saw the doctor's gig coming round to the front door.

"The doctor!" exclaimed Clare; "I never heard of his coming anywhere without being sent for!"

"Perhaps he intended to be at the funeral, but couldn't get away in time."

"He is a kind old fellow, but I hardly think, Mamma, he would have put himself out quite as far as that for poor old Bryce. His business with people, I have heard him say, ceases with their lives, though in the case of deputy lieutenants and magistrates I have noted he makes an exception."

Before her mother could reprove the speaker for her cynicism, the visitor was in the room.

"This is really good of you, my dear doctor," said Mrs. Barton, greeting him warmly. "It is a compliment indeed to have a call from you."

"Yes; it generally costs people five shillings, does it not?" was the comical reply. "So I hear you were all at old Bryce's funeral. It was not from remorse, I do assure you, that I was not there myself. Miss Clare is looking quite as she should do, I am glad to see; but what is the matter with you, Miss Rose?"

"Nothing, doctor; thank you," replied that young lady, mustering up a smile.

"You are afraid of my powders," he answered, merrily. "Well, I daresay you are better without them. I looked in this afternoon, Mrs. Barton, for a few words with you about a particular matter."

"That means we are to make ourselves scarce, Rose," said Clare, taking up her work preparatory for immediate departure. "The doctor's visit generally diminishes the population."

"What spirits that girl of yours has," he said when they were left alone together; "it must be better than a tonic to be in the same house with her."

"Yes; it is a selfish thing to say, my dear doctor, but I am afraid I should grudge either of my girls to even the best of husbands."

"Then there is not any one yet, I hope, who threatens to deprive you of them." The doctor spoke in jest, but there was a certain seriousness in his tone that did not escape his companion; she thought he had Mr. Giles in his mind (because that gentleman was in hers), and was rather glad of the opportunity of indirectly putting him right on this point. "No; they are both

fancy free, doctor; you are not come to ask for one of them yourself, are you?"

"No, indeed," he answered, with a grave smile. "I am come on a much more unpleasant errand. I had hoped to catch your husband on his return from the funeral, but they tell me he has gone out; it is perhaps just as well, for a kind-hearted woman like yourself, who at the same time has common sense, is better qualified to deal with the matter than a man. I am sorry to say, Mrs. Barton, there will be trouble in your parish, and in a most unexpected quarter."

"Not scarlet fever?" exclaimed his companion. "Tell me anything but that."

She had once lost a sister, to whom she had been devotedly attached, by that fell disease, and she feared it above all others.

"No, not scarlet fever; it is nothing catching," said the old doctor, with a grim smile. "But I am afraid it will bring sorrow and disgrace to more than one person."

"Disgrace? What *do* you mean?"

"I am afraid Hannah Bryce is not the well-principled girl we used to think her."

"Hannah Bryce! the girl by whose side I have just been standing at her grandfather's grave; it is impossible." In Mrs. Barton's face was horrified amazement, mitigated, moreover, by incredulity. The picture of the delicate and graceful girl, mourning for her only relative, was too fresh in her mind to be associated with shame.

"Do not let us think of her worse than need be," said the doctor, gravely. "She could not have known that her grandfather was going to be pitched out of his cart. But there is no doubt about it. Mrs. Sherwood, who

has been at the cottage for these three weeks, is not likely to be mistaken in such a matter; her disposition is truthful, and not scandal-loving; she is almost as sorry about it as I am. Hannah has disgraced herself."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Barton, greatly agitated; "and with whom?"

"That is the matter that brings me here. I am not quite certain about it, though I am morally certain. The evidence—frequent clandestine visits, and the like; even the strong interest he showed, you remember, on the occasion of the carrier's accident—can only point, I am deeply sorry to say, to your husband's pupil—Richard Rivers."

The colour left Mrs. Barton's delicate cheek; she lay back in her chair, with her eyes closed and her lips faintly moving. Dr. Greystone, because he *was* a doctor, was not alarmed at these physical indications, but he felt that he had overrated his companion's strength of mind; moreover, the suspicion recurred to him, which he had at first entertained, that some tender tie, if not an actual engagement, existed between her daughter Clare and Rivers. As a matter of fact, she was praying for the two sinners.

"Perhaps I was wrong, after all, Mrs. Barton, in making this revelation to you. I ought to have spoken to Mr. Barton first."

"No," she murmured, waving a thin white hand in protest, "you were right. It is my place to make quite sure of the justice of this terrible charge before laying it before him. I hope to Heaven it may never be necessary to do so."

The doctor shook his head. "I entreat of you, Mrs. Barton," he said, "to encourage no false hopes."

"I mean as regards Mr. —," the very name seemed to stick in her throat—"his pupil."

"To be sure. It is most necessary to be certain of his ground before your husband takes any steps in this sad matter. It may have far-reaching consequences."

What the doctor alluded to was the possible effect it might have on the tutor's interest as regarded his profession; but this idea never entered into Mrs. Barton's mind; not only had her moral sense received a terrible shock, but her feelings as a mother. It was not the first time her husband had had to encounter trouble of this kind, but the offender had not occupied the position in her household that Rivers had done. Her girls had liked him very much, and it would be impossible to conceal his disgrace from them; she had herself treated him almost as a son, and placed the greatest confidence in him. Her mind reverted to her comparatively recent scruples about appointing the girl to be school-mistress, on account of her beauty; and how they had never included Rivers because she had entertained so high an opinion of him. Both she and her husband had thought his father was very hard upon the young fellow, and gave him little credit for frankness and honesty; but now it appeared that he had been right and they had been wrong. It was a most distressing revelation to her. Only one thing could have made the matter worse; the very sincere liking for the young fellow, which she knew both Clare and Rose had entertained, might have been of a more tender description, in which case the catastrophe would have been still more deplorable; but from that depth of disappointment and distress at least (as she thought) her daughters were spared.

CHAPTER XVI.

A REPRIEVE.

WHETHER Dr. Greystone was right or not in his idea that it was better Mrs. Barton should be the recipient of the story of Hannah Bryce's shame, rather than her husband, he had laid upon her shoulders a very heavy burden, and one that she was not qualified to bear. Her disposition was far too gentle to deal with so serious a matter in all its bearings. She resembled the Lady Bountifuls of our villages in their benevolence, but she lacked their dignity, and the possession of that righteous indignation with which they treat the evil-doers. Her hand was fitted for the olive branch rather than the sword of justice. She ought to have marched up to the Well Cottage and told the girl what she thought of her, and given her generally her mind. But she was in no humour for marching; her limbs trembled under her as she walked up the village street upon her painful errand; and what she thought of Hannah—though it was bad enough, for her pure nature had no sort of sympathy for such shameful conduct—was largely mixed with pity. She was not one of those women who always think, in such cases, and almost always wrongly, that the woman is most to blame; she blamed most the man,—though that was no comfort to her, poor soul, if the man were Rivers; her husband's pupil and a favourite with them all—she understood, though dimly, what an advantage superiority of position gives a man when dealing with one of her own sex, and she

felt most keenly how cruel and cowardly a man must be to avail himself of it for evil. For the moment, indeed, so far as her gentle nature could permit her, she hated Rivers. The man had not only disgraced this poor girl, and himself, but the very roof that sheltered him. She blushed to think that she had been so friendly and familiar with so bad a man, and especially that he had been the companion of her daughters. The having been his hostess—and indeed far more than his hostess—seemed the greatest misfortune of her life. If he had been thrown from his horse in that mad ride of his to Market Overt, and been killed, it would have been better for them all. No, not all, she was just even in her indignation; perhaps in that case it would have been worse—if anything *could* be worse—for this wretched girl. It did not strike her that anything could be done for her even as matters were; but instinct—an unacknowledged and involuntary sympathy with a wronged and friendless girl—somehow suggested that view. She was not about to speak to her of the possibilities of her future, but of the iniquity of her past; and yet “poor girl, poor, wretched girl!” were the words that she kept saying to herself instead of rehearsing a denunciation.

I am afraid a good many of her sex would have set poor Mrs. Barton down as a weak woman. What would have been an aggravation perhaps in their eyes, it was only an hour or so ago that she had actually kissed this abandoned young female, on parting with her at her grandfather’s grave; a kiss that had been evidently obtained on false pretences; but still she *had* given it, and done so as a sort of assurance that she would do her best for the friendless girl in the days that were to come, and such was her quixotic notion of the

validity of a promise, even though only implied, that she felt the obligation still remained with her. Again, it would have seemed to some an aggravation of the girl's crime that only a few hours ago the dead body of her only relative had been borne over the threshold of her home; but this, as Dr. Greystone had pointed out, was only an imaginary grievance; she could not have foreseen, ere she sinned, what was about to happen to him, and the association in question was only one of ideas, and not of facts; yet in Mrs. Barton's mind it was not without its effect. It made her reflect how infinitely worse—for remorse has no logic—it must make Hannah feel her conduct to have been. On the whole, it is to be feared that the good lady was not at all in a proper frame of mind for the administration of justice.

To her great relief she found nurse Sherwood alone in the little parlour knitting stockings. It had been arranged that she should remain at the cottage for a little while for the sake of propriety—a wholly unnecessary precaution as it now appeared—till Hannah had made her own arrangements. She was a tall, stiff, old woman, upright as a dart, and enjoyed a high character among her betters, as being honest, capable, and little given to gossip. She had had her troubles, no doubt, but did not descant upon them, as is the nature of her class. She was kind, but by no means emotional, and spoke of things as they were, without any aspirations as to what they might have been. An intimate knowledge of rural delinquencies had long destroyed her illusions, if she had ever had any, but had by no means blunted her sensibilities. She was an excellent nurse, and not the less so because she would “stand no nonsense” from her patients, and see that the doctor's orders were obeyed in every particular. She was not lynx-eyed, in

a disagreeable sense, but was keenly observant of things about her, and (unlike Sydney Smith's carriage horse) could draw an inference.

She rose as her visitor entered the room, curtsied, and dusted a chair for her; but uttered not a syllable. She waited to be spoken to like a ghost, and with the less impatience because she was perfectly well aware from the expression of Mrs. Barton's face of what that lady had come to say.

"Oh, nurse, I have just seen Dr. Greystone, and he has made a communication to me, on your authority, which has given me the greatest distress of mind." Here she stopped, breathless with excitement and apprehension.

"It is all quite true, ma'am, I am sorry to say," was the old woman's quiet reply. "If you had called here five minutes ago, you would have seen Mr. Rivers here. There was a very sad scene between the young people."

The young people! The shock of her speaking of Rivers and Hannah in the familiar phrase that is used in describing two lovers of the same rank in life, was almost too much for poor Mrs. Barton. It was just as though one should take murder as a matter of course.

"And when did you begin to suspect that—that there was anything wrong, Mrs. Sherwood?"

"The first day or two after I came to this house. But what was the good of talking about things when they can't be mended? I was never one to make mischief, thank Heaven. But when the doctor began to suspect, too, and put his questions to me, why then I was bound to speak to Hannah herself."

"And she has confessed that she is guilty?"

"Yes, ma'am, and never was poor girl more sorry for herself. It is amazing that one so sensible should

have got into such trouble. How could she expect, as I told her, when a young gentleman comes a courting a poor village lass, that anything but shame can come of it."

The word "courting," though it grated on Mrs. Barton's ear, suggested an inquiry.

"Do you think that Mr.—that this man had the hypocrisy to promise the poor girl marriage?"

"It's almost certain, ma'am; they usually does it; and from what I know of Hannah, I feel sure it was so."

"Then he is a cruel lying scoundrel," exclaimed Mrs. Barton; she had never before applied such language to any human being, but her heart was sore within her, and the fire burned.

"No doubt, ma'am," remarked the old nurse, who had resumed her knitting; "but as to lying, it's natural to men; and though as you say, he was cruel, he did not mean to be. There's nobody in the village as does not know Mr. Rivers to be a kind-hearted young gentleman."

This was also well known to Mrs. Barton, and the consciousness of it, and of the fact that it was secretly weighing with her in his favour, made her irritated with the old woman for defending him.

"I don't know how his having pleasant manners, or being hail-fellow-well-met with everybody, can be the least ground for extenuation for his villainy."

"I am not excusing him, ma'am; but what I says to myself is, that whereas gentlefolks often puts on easy manners with us poor people, with Mr. Rivers it was natural; he did not see the difference between gentle and simple, as most young gentlemen do, and—well, there, if I must speak straight out—I do believe that

when he said so, he himself did intend to marry the girl."

"How could he?" said Mrs. Barton, half contemptuously, but with a hope at her heart of she hardly knew what, and which she half reproached herself for entertaining. For were there not other persons to be considered as regarded this man's making his victim an honest woman? His father and his family, her husband himself as one *in loco parentis* to him, not to mention (and, indeed, this did not enter into her thoughts, for abstract questions were not in her line) the premium which such a course would put upon similar falls from virtue?

"As to the how," replied the old woman, quietly, "that is what I can say nothing about. Then and now are very different matters when trouble of this kind comes to pass. Young gentlemen's consciences are not so tender when they have got all they want, as in the getting of it; and all their belongings are naturally against their doing what poor folks call the right thing. Do you think it likely, ma'am, yourself, that the Honourable Mr. Rivers, as they call him, will behave honourable to one like Hannah Bryce?"

"It is not at all likely. I suppose, indeed," said Mrs. Barton, with an involuntary sigh, "that it is impossible that he should marry her." And Mrs. Barton rose from her chair with a distressful countenance, and moved towards the stairs that led to the upper room.

"If that is what you think, ma'am," observed the old woman very gravely, "I don't think your seeing Hannah can do any good."

"But I must see her, and talk to her, and represent to her the shocking depravity of which she has been guilty; it is my duty."

"You will do as you please, of course, ma'am, but do you think she does not feel all that and a deal more—if you will pardon my plain speaking—than you do? You will find her where I left her, kneeling by her bedside, and talking to God Almighty, as far as tears will let her. She's a most broken-hearted, is the poor girl, and in my judgment, considering the condition she's in, stands more in need of comfort than scolding. I know you are as good and tender-hearted a lady as breathes, ma'am, but if you are only going up them stairs to do your duty in the way of reproach for the past, and if you have nothing to say in the way of hope for the future, then I say 'don't go.'"

"But there *is* hope for the future," observed Mrs. Barton; "there is hope for all of us, if we repent of our sins, and resolve to lead a new life; even the worst of us, in that way, can hope to reach heaven."

"That is very true, ma'am," replied the old woman, though her concurrence, it must be confessed, had a very perfunctory tone, "but Hannah is not now thinking of that kind of heaven; she is praying for a heaven on earth, or what she thinks to be such, namely, that Mr. Rivers may keep his word with her. I have done what I could with her, and though I am but an ignorant old woman, I mind the time when I was once a girl just like herself, though never so well favoured, and can read the back of her mind perhaps better than a wise lady like you, but nothing I could say except, 'Mr. Rivers will marry you' would do her one morsel of good, and if you can't say that, nor give a hope of it, you will only be breaking the bruised reed."

Mrs. Barton had placed one foot upon the lowest stair, but she now withdrew it. The interview she had designed was abhorrent to her, but it was not on that

account she hesitated in her purpose. The other's argument had moved her; not only was Mrs. Sherwood's character the reverse of emotional, but things had come to her knowledge which showed that the nurse and Hannah did not get on very well together. If, notwithstanding this, Mrs. Sherwood could make such an appeal on the girl's account, her condition must indeed be pitiable.

"Do you really think, nurse, it would be better if I spoke to Hannah later on, and not to-day?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do," was the quiet reply. "When things have shaped themselves a little one way or the other you will have a better chance of doing good. I'm not fit to advise such as you, of course, ma'am; but I'm a nurse, and it strikes me Hannah's not in a fit state to bear much chastisement, except from the Lord himself, just now."

"But I must tell my husband just as though I had seen Hannah," observed Mrs. Barton; that was another trial before her, even if she had for the present escaped this one.

"Well, of course, ma'am. There is no help for that, and, being such a clever gentleman, there may be some help in it, perhaps."

But Mrs. Barton shook her head. She had great confidence in her husband, but she also knew something of Lord Ripton, and she had but little hope.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CLOUD IN THE SKY.

It was not till the household had retired that night that Mrs. Barton made the revelation to her husband which so weighed upon her mind. It was bad enough that she should have to sit at the same table with Rivers, and treat him—though she addressed no word to him—as though he were not degraded; and she wished to spare her husband from the exercise of the same hypocrisy. Indeed, she thought it probable that he would have forbidden the young man the dinner-table, and thereby at once revealed his infamy. It was better, while he remained under their roof (for she well knew that it would be the last night he would be permitted to pass there), that the shame and embarrassment of his presence should be confined to herself. In the morning, of course, all would be known, but for that one evening, it was well (if anything could be called “well” in such a matter) to let things go on as usual. But Avis’s jokes jarred upon the poor lady’s ear at dinner, as they had never done before; and though Rivers hardly spoke a word—and she remembered now how silent he had been of late—it pained her to hear Clare address him with her customary familiarity, unconscious of the shadow of disgrace she saw so clearly with her own eyes.

But the longest evening comes to an end at last, and when her husband went to his study, as was his custom, before retiring, she went in and broke to him her sad

news as tenderly and gently as she could. It was a terrible business, even worse than she had pictured it to herself; his indignation against his pupil was painful to witness. The vials of his wrath—though this he was unconscious of—were poured out upon him as they would hardly have been against another such offender, because his own estimate of the young man's character had been so mistaken. She knew this was the case, because he called him a "hypocritical blackguard," but she was much too wise to hint that the wounding of our *amour propre* should have nothing to do with our denunciation of the wrong-doer; her object, as always, was to soothe, and not to irritate; and while carefully avoiding excuses, her mind was already set upon smoothing matters as far as it might be possible to do so.

She did not, however, venture to propose anything; indeed, she had nothing but what Mrs. Sherwood had suggested, and what she herself had declared to be impossible to propose; and she felt that the present, at all events, was not the time to speak of it. She knew that her husband was more intelligent, more full of resource, more competent to deal with affairs, than herself, and when he came to think matters calmly over, that he would do the best that could be done, even for the wrong-doer himself; as for Hannah, he had little to say against her. He could well understand that her punishment had already begun. It begins early in such cases, and never ceases. Being a man, too, he knew on which side the blame lay, or most of the blame. But what was to be done with her, was a matter that for the moment did not perplex him.

Mr. Barton sat far into the night with pen in hand, though it was not so busy as his thoughts. It was

necessary for him to write two letters, one of which gave him some trouble in its composition, and the other none at all. The first was as follows :

DEAR LORD RIPTON,

It is again my misfortune to send you bad news respecting Richard, and worse news by far than I ever thought to send. The matter of his emigration—on which, as I last wrote you, his mind is fixed—sinks into comparative insignificance beside it. He has seduced a young woman, of hitherto excellent character, in my own parish, and she is *enceinte* by him. The effect upon us all is most deplorable; we had such confidence, notwithstanding all his shortcomings, in the integrity of his principles, that we are more distressed than we can express. It is impossible, of course, that he can remain under my roof for another day, and to-morrow he will take up his quarters, as I suppose, until he leaves for Canada, at the Inn in Market Overt. To me personally it is a cruel stroke, and will, I fear, have the saddest consequences for the girl he has wronged. She is—or rather was—our parish school-mistress; unhappily for herself, exceptionally beautiful, and with ideas much above her class. She is comparatively well educated, and that she should have so ill behaved herself astonishes me only less than the conduct of your son. Her grandfather, who was much respected, is just dead, and she is utterly friendless. What it may be his intention to do for her I do not know. If any plan strikes you, I shall be only too glad, of course, so far as it lies in my power, to give effect to it. This terrible news has only reached me an hour ago, nor have I yet spoken to Richard upon the subject; I hardly dare trust myself indeed to do so just at present; on all accounts, I think it better to postpone our interview till I have heard from you. I cannot say how it grieves me, dear Lord Ripton, to communicate to you such sad news.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN BARTON.

From what Mr. Barton knew of his Lordship he thought it very unlikely that he would propose, or consent to, the only action on his son's part that could be *held as reparation* for his crime. But he had taken

care to describe Hannah in as favourable terms as he could venture upon; a girl who was comparatively well educated, with ideas above her class, and without any objectionable relatives was not, after all, so very unfit a mate for a man who had found society not to his taste, and who was in any case resolved to emigrate. Without actually suggesting their marriage, which, knowing Lord Ripton's character as he did, would have been most injudicious, he had put that method of making amends, as it were, under his eyes. For though Mr. Barton was almost as disappointed with Hannah as with her seducer, and felt a natural indignation against her, he could not help pitying the girl. He had had relations all his life with what are called "the great," and are at least "the grand," and he knew the extraordinary influence they have upon their inferiors; he had little of this weakness himself, for his character, as has been said, was, considering his peculiar position, exceptionally independent: but he knew how hard it is for a person of humble rank to say "no" to a lord or even a lord's son; he knew also that this subservience to mere rank is even greater in the female than in the male, and therefore he made more allowance for Hannah than would have been made by one of less experience, and it must be added, of a harder heart; for he pitied the girl from the bottom of his soul. Though the fault in such a case is always the man's, it is the woman who has to bear the consequences, but though the knowledge of this fact helped to set his face more rigidly against the wrong-doer, his mind was not at present with his victim. Her case must wait till he heard from Lord Ripton. But that of Rivers was "before the court," and it behooved him to use the sword of justice speedily. The

second letter Mr. Barton wrote that night had at least the merit of brevity.

SIR,

Your cruel and disgraceful conduct towards Hannah Bryce has been disclosed to me. I need hardly say that you must quit my roof to-morrow morning, without leave taking. Go to the "Bell" at Market Overt, and there remain until you hear from me. Even now, grossly as I have been deceived in it, I have so far confidence in your character as to feel you will not fill up the measure of your baseness by a coward's flight.

JOHN BARTON.

"That I think is strong enough," mused Mr. Barton, after a perusal of the composition. The writing of it had done him good. His knitted brow relaxed a little, and he drew a sigh of relief as he folded up the little note and addressed it to his erring pupil.

It was not through any weak desire to defer what was certain to prove a most painful interview that he had resolved for the present to hold no communication with Rivers. Invective can be used at any time; like vengeance, it is a dish that can be eaten cold; but until he had heard from Lord Ripton, he had no proposal of any kind to make to Rivers; he knew indeed what reparation ought to be made, and perhaps had Richard been a son of his own he would have insisted on that course being adopted; but he was bound in his position to consult the views of the young man's father.

As he passed along the passage into which opened the rooms of his pupils, he saw by the light beneath the door that Rivers was the only one who had not yet retired; indeed, as he drew near he could hear him walking to and fro, though it was past midnight. He had done so himself in times of mental trouble, and

though he had no personal experience of it, he felt how much worse trouble must be to bear when associated with disgrace and shame. He was too indignant with him to be pitiful, but some such feeling actuated him as causes one to say "Poor devil" of a criminal, though he has deserved his fate, condemned to be hanged. For he well knew that this man was at heart no callous wrong-doer, but would suffer for the wrong he had done, and that not only on his own account, most bitterly. But what was the use of penitence without reparation. Mr. Barton only waited for an instant to stoop and thrust his note beneath the door, and then hastened on to his own room. He was full of sorrow, much of which was personal; his feelings were hurt by the young man's conduct, and he knew that its effect upon his whole household would be most painful and embarrassing; but as to material consequences arising from it to himself, they never entered into his mind. It is the character of the worst of human misfortunes to be unsuspected.

Sad as may be his position to whom, though he is "not at ease," still trouble comes, cruel as it is to have to bear the apprehension of the evil as well as the evil itself, it is even worse for us when the bolt of ruin comes from a clear sky. There was not even a cloud the size of a man's hand visible to Mr. Barton's mental eye, so far as his own future was concerned; but the bolt was about to fall, and it was fated to be one man's hand which precipitated the catastrophe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

POOR ROSE.

WONDERFUL as is the electric telegraph, there is a far older and swifter method of communicating news among mankind. How the thing is done is equally inexplicable, for science, while making use of her light-heeled handmaid, does not yet pretend to understand her, nor has it yet been revealed how Rumour flies. But it does fly, and more swiftly than on the wings of the wind. Hardly had the wheels of the pony cart which took Richard Rivers, in the early morning, to the Bell Inn, at Market Overt, ceased to revolve ere Hannah Bryce's shame was known to all Leadon. There was sorrow no doubt among the villagers, but not unmixed with a certain satisfaction. If the catastrophes of our friends and equals are less welcome to us than the cynic has described, those of our superiors, it is certain, are borne with something more than equanimity; and though Hannah was popular in the village, there were not wanting those of her sex who were jealous of her position and attainments, and who were not sorry that pride (as they put it, though she had shown no pride) should have a fall. But at the Rectory there was sorrow indeed, both on her account and on his who had brought shame on her, and who seemed, in so doing, to have brought shame upon themselves. The breakfast table had been, unfortunately, arranged as usual, and the empty chair was a sad reminder of the disgrace that had befallen the most popular of the little household. Of conversation there was none. Con-

straint sat on every countenance, even on that of Avis. It was only when he found himself in the pupil-room alone with Leicester that he could breathe freely.

"By jingo," he said; "this business, to use the language of the poet, is 'a most tremendous go,' is it not, Sir Guy?" He often gave his fellow-pupil his title by anticipation, though it was always resented. Leicester, however, was too downcast about what had happened to pay any attention to such ill-timed pleasantry.

"It is a very sad and distressing thing. Poor old Bart seems quite heart-broken."

"Likewise Mrs. B., and the Miss B.'s. I always told you that Clare was rather sweet upon the erring one."

"I never heard you say anything of the kind," said Leicester, with a flush of colour; "that is, if you mean on Rivers."

"Well, of course on Rivers; I told you so when I informed you of my discovery that Rose doted on *you*. I am never wrong on these things. Of course, he has now done for himself with Miss Clare; but it was easy to see how savage she was with him; all breakfast time she looked like a swan, 'Born to be the only graceful shape of scorn,' as the bard describes the bird; I almost expected her to flap her wings and hiss."

"I did not notice that," observed Leicester, coldly.

"Very likely; that is because you have not my talent for observation. *Your* young woman, on the other hand, Miss Rose, took it very quietly; it was a sad business her face said, but no business of hers. But, nevertheless, it is a blow, of course, for the whole family. You will do me the justice to remember that I always said Miss Hannah was approachable; and you cannot have forgotten how angry Rivers got with me, awhile ago, for hinting as much. However, I was only

chaffing, and never, I confess, suspected our Simon Pure of such goings on. I thought he belonged to the Muscular Christians, and was all for cricket and high principles."

"He's got in a most infernal scrape," sighed Leicester.

"And serves him right," said Avis, elliptically. "It's the poor girl I pity.

When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And learns too late that men betray,

there's always the deuce to pay, and it is she who has to find the money."

"That is very true," admitted Leicester. "I am very, very sorry for Hannah. It is my opinion that he ought to marry her."

"Ought stands for nothing. He's about as like to marry his grandmother. I should like to see old Ripton's face when that idea was suggested to him."

"Rivers has no great respect for his father," mused Leicester; "and, for my part, I hope he'll do what is right."

"There is no harm in hoping, my dear fellow; but you may take your oath that, if he did, he would find himself cut off with a shilling. Uncle Pud would do just the same with me under similar circumstances, and much more if he was a lord."

"Well, he is not a lord," said Leicester; "that ought to be a comfort to you."

Even the swift-tongued Avis had no reply to make to this statement. Though it had the air of sarcasm, it was uttered with perfect seriousness and simplicity. Leicester had his reasons for reflecting that there were disadvantages in having a father who was even a baro-

net, with a rent roll of twenty thousand a year. As Avis, however, with all his intellectual endowments, could not get at the back of his companion's mind, he had some cause for resenting his observation; and though he answered nothing, the relations between him and his fellow-pupil became strained for the next few hours.

While Rivers was thus the cause of discord in the pupil-room, he cast the boudoir into gloom. The three ladies had repaired there after breakfast, for which they had shown but little appetite.

"I never saw your dear father so distressed and depressed as by this deplorable misfortune," observed Mrs. Barton. "He wishes that Mr. Rivers's name should never more be mentioned to him. You will remember that, my dears."

"I should not dream of mentioning it to anybody," said Clare, stiffly; "and I am quite sure Rose will not do so."

Rose did not speak; her head was resting on her hand, which concealed her face, but she bowed in acquiescence.

"And I need scarcely say, Clare," continued her mother, "that you will not in future visit the Well Cottage." It was not necessary, she thought, to lay any such injunction upon her younger daughter, to whom, if she could have helped it, she would never have alluded to the subject in question at all.

"As you please, mother," said Clare, quietly; "if you think I can do no good."

"You can do none; if it is necessary to hold any communication with Hannah, I am the proper person to do it. What is the matter with Rose?" for that young lady had suddenly left the room.

"She had a great regard for Hannah, you know, mamma; and the subject of conversation was no doubt distressing to her."

"Perhaps it is just as well she is gone; Rose is quite a child in some things, and one cannot wish it to be otherwise. I am afraid your dear father has more trouble before him consequent on this misfortune than he foresees."

"Surely not, mamma. He must see it only too clearly."

"As regards others, of course, but not as regards himself. I am afraid this dreadful occurrence will do him serious harm in his profession."

"But how can that possibly be? He is not to blame in any way."

"No, but parents and guardians are apt to be very unreasonable in such cases; I fear it will shake their confidence in him. Hannah, you see, was the school-mistress; a girl, as they will say, who ought to have been under his own eye."

"I cannot understand how papa can be answerable for his pupils' vices."

"But if Mr. Rivers marries the poor girl as he ought to do——"

"Of course he ought, if he has a spark of good feeling left in him," put in Clare vehemently.

"Just so; but that would be a *mesalliance*, the one thing which is most feared by the class of persons who intrust their sons to a private tutor, and which he is understood to especially guard against."

"Papa will do what is right, we may be sure," said Clare confidently; "and nobody can be punished for doing that."

Mrs. Barton shook her head. She was a gentle and

docile soul, not at all inclined to murmur at the decrees of Fate; but though of simpler character than her daughter, she had lived longer in the world and seen more of its doings.

"Besides," said Clare, "if Lord Ripton consents to the marriage, and the matter, as you say, has been placed in his hands, no one else should have a word to say."

"Heaven grant it may be so," sighed Mrs. Barton; "we have had much to be thankful for, and it is ungrateful to anticipate misfortune. I think it would be wise, after this trying morning, if you girls were to get some fresh air, and take a walk—though, of course, only in the garden." She feared that if they went outside the gates they might have questions put to them by the curious.

When Clare reached her sister's room, she was about to knock at the door, for she was one of those rare young ladies with whom relationship does not destroy politeness, when her ear caught the sound of suppressed sobs. Her face at once altered its expression; it had been grave before, but now it became distressed; a wave half of sympathy, half of fear, passed swiftly over it. Then she knocked ever so gently. When people are sobbing they do not easily hear outward sounds, and again she knocked; but even then waited in vain for permission to enter. Then, feeling seriously alarmed, she softly opened the door. Her sister, standing with her back to her, was arranging, or pretending to arrange, some flowers in a little vase. For the moment Clare was deceived.

"Did you not hear me knock, Rose? Mamma says——" Here she caught sight of her sister's face. Women are generally as quick to destroy the traces of tears as to shed them, but not in such a case as this.

It would have taken many minutes to have restored Rose Barton's face to its usual placid condition. Like a summer brook after sudden flood it showed terrible traces of the storm of sorrow that had swept it. Her eyes were still heavy with tears; her cheeks were furrowed with them; her long brown hair was wet with them, and hung dishevelled about her shoulders.

"Good Heavens, my dear Rose, what is the matter?" inquired Clare.

"Nothing; nothing that you do not know, at least. Is *that* not matter enough?" answered the girl, reproachfully.

"Well, of course, it is most deplorable and disgraceful. We are all sorry and distressed about it. Mamma has been saying that she even fears it will injure dear papa in getting pupils; but I hope not. As to you and me, we have otherwise nothing to do with it. We have lost a friend, but he was evidently never worthy of friendship; and the sooner we forget him the better."

"Forget him?" exclaimed the other, passionately. "I mean"—the flowers dropped from her hands, which she threw up to her face, as though to hide its crimson shame.

"Rose, Rose, what *do* you mean?" Clare put her arm about her sister's waist, who had burst into a passion of hysterical sobs, and stroked her bent-down head with gentle hand. "Of course it is very sad that one whom we both liked so much has proved unworthy. But we have done with Mr. Rivers. Papa says that we must never mention his name again, and he is quite right."

"I never *will* mention his name," sobbed the unhappy girl, throwing her arms around her sister's neck, "but *oh, Clare dear, I loved him so, I loved him so.*"

It was a declaration for which Clare was altogether unprepared, and it shocked her. She had liked Rivers very much, and even more, as she had imagined, than her sister did. Her tastes and amusements had thrown him more into her company; she had, up to the last twelve hours, entertained a high opinion of his character and principles; she had thought him ill-treated by his family, and given him her sympathy as well as her friendship. But from the moment she had heard of his misconduct, in her eyes revealing a nature gross and vile, he had been not only exiled from her heart, but she entertained a personal dislike for him, as for one who had gained her good opinion under false pretences. The hearing such a confession from her sister's lips was distressing to her from every point of view: but what she resented most of all was, that a nature so pure and unselfish had been imposed upon by one she now pictured to herself as a hypocritical scoundrel. No sign of this, however, could be seen in her face, or read in the tone of her reply, which was studiously calm and gentle.

"What you tell me, my darling Rose, gives me great pain, but the worst sting that sorrow can inflict at least is spared you, for you have no cause to reproach yourself about it. No one can help their love, and so long as we imagine its object to be worthy of it there is no need for shame."

"Then you are not angry with me, Clare dear," murmured the girl; "I was so afraid you would be angry."

"What right have I to be angry with you, my darling? You never told your love?" she added, with sudden anxiety.

"No, never; and he never guessed it."

Though her tone was confident enough, it had a pathetic touch of sorrow which did not escape the other's ear. Clare murmured to herself, "Thank Heaven," but even while she did so she pitied the poor heart whose tenderness had looked for response in vain.

"That is so far well, my darling," she answered, gently. Then, in a tone of conviction, grave and sorrowful, she added, "When love is unspoken, the loss of it is more easy to bear; how much more when we know it to have been misplaced. Do not suppose I am using 'a little hoard of maxims to preach down a sister's heart,' for I am telling you the truth, Rose. If you feel inclined to talk to me about this matter, darling, do so; either now or at any other time. My heart is always open to you, so I am sure would our mother's be; but, if I were you, I would say nothing of this to mother; it would only be an additional cause of distress to her, and perhaps she would not understand it quite so well as I, for I do understand it." Words are "mere words," it is true, but sometimes they are a precious balm to wounded hearts. Rose's sobs grew less and less violent. She lifted up her tear-worn face for Clare's tender caress. She had found, for the time at least, a comforter.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. GILES BECOMES CONFIDENTIAL.

PERHAPS it was not very wise in Mr. Barton to have selected Market Overt as Richard Rivers's Siberia. He had, however, to be exiled somewhere, and it was de-

sirable to keep him for the present near at hand. As he had written to him in that ukase of dismissal, his tutor did not believe so ill of the young man even yet as to think him capable of flight—of putting, that is, into effect at once his resolve to emigrate to Canada and so evade his responsibilities; but he feared that, if he were sent too far away, to London, for instance, his mind might be distracted from what should have been its chief reflection, how best to make reparation for his misbehaviour. While he remained in the neighbourhood amid the scenes with which Hannah was connected, he felt that this could hardly be the case. *

On the other hand, his being lodged at the Bell of course accentuated the scandal. Not a soul in Market Overt but knew, within a few hours, to what they owed the presence of the Hon. Richard Rivers amongst them; and among the first to hear it was the Reverend Gideon Giles. To say that he was glad, would be to impute a want of charity to a most respectable divine; but to say that he was sorry, would have been an exaggeration. He was sorry of course, in the abstract, that anything so contrary to the laws of morality should have taken place. But, if it was to have happened, it could not have happened, as regarded the rector's interests, to a better man. Mr. Rivers's conduct had certainly put him out of the running with respect to the prize for which Mr. Giles thought he had been contending; and, since the favourite was scratched, there was naturally a better chance for the second favourite, which he modestly imagined himself to be. This caused the rector to be very reticent on the matter in question, and to sharply rebuke a certain local busybody who would fain have enlarged upon it; a circumstance which Mr. Barton did not fail to hear,

and which he set down to Mr. Giles's credit. He was very grateful to everybody who kept silence upon the distressing topic, though he did not find many people to lay him under that obligation.

Even the squire and his wife lifted up their hands and eyes in a manner that he could scarcely ignore. "Your pupil has disappointed me, Barton," said the former; "I always took him for a gentleman."

Mrs. Jermyn expressed a still greater indignation; perhaps she was conscious of Rivers having failed in a certain idyllic rôle with which she had invested him, and she did not spare her invectives, though, from natural good feeling, she did not indulge in them, when any of the Rectory folk were present; indeed, one of the sources of her wrath was the thought of the distress and pain the offender must have given that innocent household. She spoke of the matter to others, however, including Mr. Giles, quite unreservedly, "as a disgrace to the whole village." As the rector of Market Overt, that gentleman could be hardly expected to share this latter feeling, and, indeed, he gave her no encouragement beyond his earnest attention. It did not, however, displease him to listen to her just indignation, and far less when in her impulsive manner she hinted that at one time she had hoped Mr. Rivers had fixed his legitimate affections upon another object still nearer home. Then he toyed with his gold eye-glasses—for he was very nearsighted—smiled sadly, but significantly, and shook his head.

This was quite enough, in the eyes of match-making Mrs. Jermyn, to give a new interest to the conversation. She guessed the truth in fact, at once (which the other had intended her to do, and even perhaps a little more than the truth), and all her sympathies went out

to meet him. While Rivers had been a possibility in the marriage market, the romantic old lady had not conceived of Mr. Giles as a candidate for Clare's hand; he was so very inferior to him (to look at) as a rival in the matrimonial lists, but now that the scutcheon of her favourite knight had been disgraced, she began to think seriously of the rector as a bridegroom, if only as a *pis aller*. That he would be an excellent match for Clare, in the way of money, she had, of course, known all along; but Mrs. Jermyn, though stout and elderly, had romantic views of love, which could not, so to speak, be assimilated with Mr. Giles; but now, from stress of circumstances, they became assimilated.

"I sometimes wonder," she said *apropos des bottes* (as her custom was) "how you can live in your great house, Mr. Giles, so contentedly all alone."

"Contentedly or not, I am obliged to do so," said Mr. Giles, modestly, "for I can persuade nobody to share my solitude."

"You can't, of course, if you don't ask them," said Mrs. Jermyn, bluntly, and, indeed, almost contemptuously, for she had "no patience" with laggards in love. "You can't expect young ladies to ask *you*."

"Except in leap year," suggested Mr. Giles, with a painful smile, for, like the Scotch gentleman, he "joked with difficulty."

"And that will not be for the next three years; your chance will not have improved by that time, you know," was the merciless reply; he felt that the old lady's eyes were fixed upon a certain spot on his crown where he was already getting prematurely bald.

"That is very true," he admitted, lugubriously.

"Well, you know the proverb, 'Faint heart never won fair lady.'"

He nodded, but in mournful assent, as a hearse horse might nod. He knew the old saw very well, and had proved it by personal experience.

"Then why don't you pluck up a spirit?" said the old lady. It was dreadful that she should address him in this contemptuous manner, but it showed Mr. Giles that she might be useful to him. She might say a good word for him; perhaps even be induced to make his offer for him, or at all events to smooth the way.

"The fact is," he stammered, "I have not had any opportunity."

"Stuff and nonsense. You should *make* an opportunity. Choose your own time."

Poor Mr. Giles looked as if he had been advised to make a watch, which (if he could but have done it) might have helped him perhaps as to the time. "She holds her head too high," he pleaded. He was referring, of course, to her reserved and cold demeanour, but, considering the difference in their statures, the observation was capable of two meanings. Mrs. Jermyn was within a hair's-breadth of taking the wrong one, as could be perceived by her efforts to suppress a peal of merriment. She said, "That may not be pride, as you seem to suggest; or rather, it may arise from quite another kind of pride, a feeling of inferiority as regards fortune. She may say to herself, 'Nobody shall ever say that I set my cap at this man.'"

"No one could ever say that of the young lady I have in my mind," observed Mr. Giles, confidently.

"You are quite right," exclaimed Mrs. Jermyn, approvingly. "You would be right to say so in any case, but if I am not mistaken as to whom we are talking about, no one could say it with truth." She had never liked the rector so much as at that moment. There

was a flush upon his sallow cheek that seemed to her to become it very much. It was plain that he at least knew the value of the prize he sought.

The rector perceived, though he knew not why, that he had made a good impression.

"If, dear Mrs. Jermyn, you could use your influence on my behalf with—with the young lady in question—you would lay me under an eternal obligation."

"My dear Mr. Giles, I wish her well, and I wish *you* well, but believe me, in affairs of this kind, a man can only help himself. A girl resents, and I think rightly resents, the interference of another in a matter so important to her own happiness. She does not demand eloquence of a suitor, but she does require straightforwardness. There are cases, of course, when the man is not for the present in a very prosperous condition, when it is right and proper that he should first apply to the father for permission to pay his court, but that is not at all your case. What on earth is there to be afraid of, my good sir! Clare will not bite you."

"Bite me!" echoed the rector. "Dear me, what a very strange thing to say."

"I was speaking figuratively, of course. What I mean is, you should tell her with your own lips what you have in your heart. Not to-day, of course," added Mrs. Jermyn, soothingly, for Mr. Giles's face had become suddenly pallid with alarm; "as I have said, you must choose your time. It would not be wise to speak to her just now, when the family are in trouble and she has got something else to think about."

"You mean Mr. Rivers."

"Yes, or rather the shame which his conduct has caused them." It did not escape her that the rector was thinking upon the offender, and not the offence. It

was probable that, like herself, he had credited Clare with a tenderness for this erring young man. If so, perhaps she was giving her companion bad advice in recommending him not to press his suit at present. Not a few girls, when they find their love has been misplaced, are more ready at such a time to transfer their affections elsewhere. Yet Clare, she reflected, was not a girl to marry through pique. "Just so," said the rector, naively; "I'll wait till he has left the Bell."

This literalness, the obvious offspring of simplicity, would under other circumstances have touched Mrs. Jermyn; but she could not but confess to herself that, as a lover, Mr. Giles would be likely to make a fool of himself, and Clare had a very keen sense of the ridiculous. It was said by a great theologian, that no one can be a true believer in any Faith who cannot afford to laugh at it; but that is not the case with Love.

"Upon reconsideration, Mr. Giles," said Mrs. Jermyn, "I think it would perhaps be better for you—in the first place, at least—to speak with one of her parents instead of to Clare."

The relief expressed by Mr. Giles's face was pleasant to behold; he was one of those persons who would rather make twenty affidavits than appear once in a witness-box. In the present instance he was much more like a timid suitor, who prefers an advocate of any kind to pleading his own case before the judge—a judge, indeed, clothed in greater dignity than can be bestowed by ermine and scarlet, and whose sentence he honestly believed would mean happiness or misery to him for the rest of his life.

"Is it not possible, my dear Mrs. Jermyn," said the rector, pleadingly, "that you would speak to Mr. Barton for me?"

"To Mr. Barton, certainly not; but if an opportunity occurs I will drop a hint of your wishes to his wife."

"What a dear, good woman you are," exclaimed the rector, rapturously; "I wish I had confided in you long ago."

"If you had done so," thought the lady, "you would have received very little encouragement;" but she only smiled kindly and returned the pressure of his hand as he took his leave. He was not a very fitting cavalier for the damsel he had in his mind, no doubt; but was an excellent match for her in the way of fortune. Mr. Jermyn had spoken more than once to his wife of the very small provision that the tutor had probably made for his family, and how hard it would go with "dear Mrs. Barton and those nice girls" should anything happen to him.

It would be well, indeed, if such a catastrophe could be guarded against.

CHAPTER XX.

A PENITENT.

By return of post Mr. Barton received Lord Ripton's reply to his letter.

DEAR SIR,—The news you send me is disagreeable enough, but not surprising. I have long been forced to the conviction that Richard was absolutely set upon taking his own way, and disregarding the great advantages which my influence in the commercial world would have afforded him. I say nothing of social position, which he seems to be incapable of understanding, far less of appreciating; there are some people of the highest station who are born blackguards, and he is one of them. I have done with him. He may go to Canada, so far as I am concerned, or to the devil.

As to the intrigue you speak of, that is only what one would have expected in one who prefers low company to that of his own class. Under other circumstances, it would certainly have seemed to me a somewhat high-handed proceeding on your part, to have turned a young man of Richard's position out of your house, for an offence of that description, but at the worst it will doubtless only precipitate a course of action which he has long resolved upon. From henceforth I wash my hands of him. I beg to inclose a cheque for the sum in which I am indebted to you, up to date, and I remain
Yours truly,

RIPTON.

This letter was in some respects displeasing to Mr. Barton, but in other not unwelcome. Its tone was curt almost to insolence; the contemptuous indifference with which his lordship treated his son's offence against morality, and which had given such distress and sorrow to his correspondent, was in Mr. Barton's eyes disgusting. As his lordship had said, some people of the highest station are born blackguards, and he himself was one of them.

On the other hand, his letter had given the tutor a free hand. Since he had now disowned his son, and "washed his hands" of him, it was obviously open to Richard to take his own way as regarded Hannah Bryce, and in Mr. Barton's eyes there was but one way, consonant with justice, for him to take. Without Lord Ripton's permission, and being as it were his representative, he could hardly have recommended it, or at all events have done so with authority, but, as his lordship had thrown off all responsibility in the matter, it had fallen on Mr. Barton's shoulders. He was secretly not sorry for this, for he flattered himself that his influence with Rivers was considerably greater than that of his parent had ever been. He had waited for this communication before making up his mind on the subject,

but he had not been able to prevent certain considerations from presenting themselves to him.

The character of Rivers was an exceptional one; he, the tutor, did not think, with his father, that he had any natural tendency for low company; but he was obviously indifferent to what are called the claims of society. In marrying Hannah Bryce he would not feel that he was disgracing himself, on the contrary he *had* disgraced himself, and by such a reparation would be doing his best to make amends for it. It was not the case of a young man of family allying himself, as so often happens, with a girl of bad character. Hannah had lost her character of course, but through him, and him only. Mr. Barton could not bring himself to think, shamefully as she had behaved, that she was a bad girl. And in some respects she was eminently suited to be this young man's wife. She was neither uneducated, nor vulgar in her manners; she was accustomed to domestic life, and to labour, if not absolutely to hard work; the very helpmate for an emigrant. That such a marriage would be a bad example for the village, and considered a premium upon vice, was only too likely; but was the girl to be abandoned by this man and ruined for life? Their marriage seemed to him the lesser of two great evils. But *would* Rivers marry her? He would be a great scoundrel to refuse to do so; but perhaps at heart he was so. Mr. Barton had been entirely disappointed in the view he had taken of his character hitherto, and he might be disappointed again. In that case he would at least have the pleasure of telling the young gentleman what he thought of him.

To relieve the mind of its impressions when they have become so to speak acute, is no doubt a great satisfaction, one of those "violent delights" in which even

the mildest of men take pleasure. As Mr. Barton drove over to Market Overt in his pony chaise that morning, he hoped, however, that matters would not come to that pass, and that the speaking of his mind would be within certain limits. The Bell was in the middle of the little town, and fronted the narrow street. Its sole ornament was a portico, over which was the state sitting-room, in which he rightly conceived his late pupil would be located. It was not (he was pleased to think) a cheerful residence in which to have passed three days. There would have been plenty of opportunities for its inmate to reflect upon his transgression and to propose to himself reparation and amendment. He justly concluded that the young man would have stayed indoors, and not indulged the inhabitants of Market Overt with the opportunity of staring at him and commenting on his iniquities.

The appearance of Mr. Richard Rivers, indeed, when his tutor appeared at the door of his sitting-room, was not unlike that of a prisoner who in the condemned cell awaits not the consolations, but the ministrations of the chaplain. He rose respectfully and stood with downcast head in silence while his visitor addressed him.

"It is not my present purpose," said Mr. Barton, touched, in spite of himself, by the young fellow's penitent demeanour, "to reproach you with your disgraceful conduct; I still credit you with so much of conscience and good feeling as must make you more ashamed of yourself, more remorseful, more humiliated than any words of mine can do. There is no personal matter now between you and me of any kind. No, sir," for the young man had looked up with a certain expression of tender remonstrance, "I can never again take

the hand of one who has behaved as you have done; who have done your best to disgrace me; who have insulted indirectly those most dear to me; who have, in a word, forfeited your right to the name of gentleman. But I am here on behalf of the poor girl you have so cruelly betrayed and ruined. Reparation, in its true sense, it is not in your power to offer; but I conclude you contemplate reparation. I cannot suppose that you are so mean a hound as to fling her from you like a dead flower which your own hand has plucked from its stem."

"God in Heaven forbid," cried the young man, earnestly. "Oh sir, do not make me out more base and cowardly than I am."

"That is impossible," said Mr. Barton, coldly; Rivers's appeal to his Creator had not impressed him favourably; he disapproved of it in itself, and he also imagined it had been made for effect, in which he did the young man wrong. The tutor, in fact, was the more angry with his late pupil in that he had laid that self-denying ordinance upon his tongue as regards reproach; for, after all, though that little member has been so much abused, it acts as a safety-valve, and those who use "swear words" in the heat of passion are often less bitter and malignant than the more moderate and mealy mouthed. Those terrible words, "That is impossible," seemed to paralyze the unhappy culprit. "I have nothing to say for myself; nothing, sir," he murmured, "if that is what you mean."

"No, it is not what I mean," answered Mr. Barton, drily. "If you will dismiss the idea of yourself altogether—even for five minutes—you will oblige me. I want to know what you intend to do as regards Hannah Bryce."

"I intend, of course, to marry her."

It was impossible to doubt the sincerity of the young man's tone. It had not only the ring of earnest conviction, but to Mr. Barton's ear, of long-meditated reflection. It was the first gleam of satisfaction that the interview had afforded him; and the tutor resented it. It was not right that he should feel satisfied with anything belonging to Mr. Richard Rivers.

"It is a pity that this honourable intention did not occur to you earlier," he replied. "Even now, perhaps, it may be somewhat remote."

"No, sir, it is not so. It would have happened in any case before I left England, and should have happened long ago. I am under no mistake about the sacrifices it may involve."

"Sacrifices! What have you to sacrifice?"

"Nothing, sir; I am speaking of Hannah."

"Oh, I did not understand. Thanks to you, however, it does not appear to me that she has much left to sacrifice."

"She has to leave her country and her home," said the young man, simply, "with the person who, having disgraced her, is hardly to be trusted as a companion for life. This mischief—or some part of it at least—has been caused by Hannah's refusal to leave her grandfather; that obstacle has now been removed, but I am under no misapprehension as to who will have the worst of the bargain, if I may so speak of our marriage. She will be taking for her husband one who has shown himself unworthy of her; I shall be taking for my wife one whose only fault was to love me too well."

The young fellow's tone was so unaffectedly contrite, and at the same time so full of conviction, that it was

difficult to doubt his word. Mr. Barton had to call to mind the gravity of his offence, and the hypocrisy he had practised, to keep incredulity alive and his indignation at the proper heat.

"You speak very fair, Mr. Rivers," he said, "but it is deeds and not words that are required of you. What steps have you taken, or do you propose to take, to accomplish this act of reparation?"

"I will do anything you suggest, sir; it is simply my ignorance of such matters that has prevented my doing what, to put it on no higher ground, is a simple act of justice. I am told that to be married in London a residence of three weeks would be requisite, and I hardly knew how that was to be accomplished without the risk of that disclosure which has unhappily taken place."

This sounded very like the truth, but on the other hand it might not be the truth; a departure for London would afford an obvious opportunity for the young man's giving the girl the slip, and escaping from his responsibilities altogether. On her account Mr. Barton felt bound to mistrust him, even when he felt no mistrust. He also wished to assure himself that Rivers had regarded his own position from every point of view before coming to the conclusion at which he claimed to have arrived.

"Have you considered what your father is likely to say to such a plan as you propose?"

"I *know* what he would say, sir, and also do. He would wash his hands of me, as he calls it, but, as he has already promised to do that in case of my going to Canada, which I intended all along to do, it can make no difference in our relations."

"I understand, therefore, that if the opportunity offered you would marry this girl at once."

"Most certainly I would, sir."

"Very good; then there will be no difficulty about that, for I will get a license to-morrow and you shall be married in Leadon Church, the day after, and I myself will perform the ceremony."

"That is more than I deserve, sir, or should have ventured to ask," said Rivers, earnestly.

"I don't say that it isn't," replied Mr. Barton, drily. "There are objections to such a course, no doubt (he was thinking of the example), but upon the whole it is the best and safest plan; it will make an honest woman of the girl in the eyes of the parish."

Perhaps Mr. Barton was thinking of the girl more than she had any right to expect, but he was certainly not thinking of himself. If he had been thinking more of his own interests and less of those of other people, he might even have hesitated to make that much too good-natured proposition.

CHAPTER XXI.

BREAKING THE NEWS.

MR. BARTON came home from his interview with his late pupil in high spirits; indeed, in the best of spirits, since they were caused by the conviction that he had done a good stroke of business for a friendless and a fallen fellow-creature. That Hannah Bryce did not deserve the good fortune that had thus befallen her was a reflection that did not very much trouble the tender-hearted tutor. He felt that after all it would

only help to restore the average, since a good many people get worse things than they deserve instead of better. He was now confident that Rivers had all along intended to repair the wrong he had committed, but it was a satisfaction to think that he had clinched the matter by making it easy for him to do so, and he told his wife how nicely he had arranged the affair with not a little triumph and self-complacency.

Mrs. Barton received the news with pleasure, but not unalloyed with apprehension. She was not what is called a clever woman, but she had plenty of intelligence, and especially in matters wherein those she loved were concerned; affection, though it blinds the eyes, sharpens the wits. "I am glad, of course, John, for Hannah's sake, and also for Mr. Rivers's, that this terrible business has had so fortunate a conclusion; but I confess I am sorry that you have undertaken to marry them."

"But, my dear, do you not see the fitness of it? Is it not right and proper that this young man should make the fullest amends to the girl in his power? and how can he better acknowledge his fault, and at the same time, so far as it is possible, repair it, than by making her an honest woman in the sight of her own people?"

"I quite see that, John, and also the kindness of heart which dictated your offer," replied Mrs. Barton, with her sweet smile, but speaking very gravely; "only what I fear is that your taking such a personal part in the matter may give, to those who do not know you as I do, a certain air of condonation; and it is very important to one in your position not to seem too forgiving,—to say the least of it,—to anything in the shape of a *mesalliance* as regards your pupils. I sup-

pose, so far as Lord Ripton is concerned, it will make no difference——”

“How can it do so,” interrupted Mr. Barton, “when he has written to say he has washed his hands of Richard? He would not have sent me another of his sons in any case,” he added, smiling.

Mrs. Barton did not smile, but answered cheerfully that no doubt her fears were groundless, and that her dear John has acted as wisely as well, and even confessed her sorrow for having met his very natural satisfaction with such coldness and want of appreciation. It hurt her, not indeed to displease her husband, for that she had never done, but to rob him of the smallest pleasure; she was one of those women, of whom there are not a few, whose end and aim in life was to increase the sum of human happiness, but especially that of her own household; all self-sacrifice on her part on their account was a positive pleasure, and every pain and trouble of theirs, had it been possible, she would willingly have endured in their place. If the sons of God ever came down to the daughters of men and married them, they have given up the practice, but the daughters of God have taken it up, and still wed the sons of men. Mrs. Barton narrated to Clare what had happened, though this time without alluding to her apprehensions on the subject. She spoke of it only as an excellent arrangement made by dear papa for the salvation of Hannah Bryce from the consequence of her fall.

“It is more than she deserves,” observed Clare, not harshly, but with that stern sense of justice which youth (when virtuous) always thinks it becoming to express even when secretly leaning to the side of mercy.

"That is true," returned the elder lady, gently; "yet, if Mr. Rivers had not married her, we might have said the same of her punishment."

"And where is his?" inquired Clare, drily.

"Papa thinks that he has not escaped at least the sharp tooth of remorse."

"We shall—none of us—ever see him again, I trust," said Clare. Her tone was earnest enough, but to do her justice she was not thinking of herself at all, but of how terrible it would be for Rose to see him.

"Of course not. They will be married, as privately as possible, quite early on Friday morning; then they will start for London, and set sail for Canada at the end of next week."

This was a relief to Clare. It would be good for Rose that this man should not be even in the same hemisphere with her; that there would be no chance of her ever even hearing of him; that, whatever evil he had unconsciously done to her, he would have passed out of her life. Yet she wondered how her sister would take the news. It would give pleasure to her pure unselfish soul, no doubt, but also, perhaps, a pang.

"I suppose I must tell Rose," said Mrs. Barton, doubtfully, "for though it's no concern of hers in any way, her ignorance of the matter might lead to some embarrassment; else it is just as well not to talk to her of such things."

"I will tell her," said Clare, "if you prefer it."

"Do, my dear; it will be better for you than me to do so; it will make less of the matter."

This was not Clare's view at all; it would be much more painful to her, knowing what she did, to speak to Rose upon the subject than her mother, and only too

likely to make more instead of less of it; but it was so important that her mother should know nothing of Rose's unfortunate attachment, and it was just possible that under the stress of emotion she might discover it. So, on the first opportunity of her sister and herself being alone, Clare took this unwelcome task upon her own shoulders.

"You will be glad to hear, dear, that Hannah's bad behaviour is not to be punished so severely as it might have been. Mr. Rivers is going to marry her."

"Thank God," ejaculated Rose, with earnest reverence. "Not," she added, very softly, "that I ever thought Mr. Rivers capable of deserting her."

"She has not that confidence in him herself, I fancy," observed Clare, drily; "at least if Mrs. Sherwood is to be believed. She says the girl is almost out of her mind with anxiety and apprehension."

"Poor thing, poor thing; she ought to have known him better."

"Perhaps I was wrong to say she has no confidence in his intentions; but she has not seen him of course since—since her shame was known. Papa made Mr. Rivers promise to remain at Market Overt till he had written to his father; but to-day he has been over there and seen him, and has undertaken to marry them himself, here, on Friday morning."

To this no answer was returned; Clare went to her sister's little bookshelf (for it was in her room, of course, the communication was made) and took down book after book, as if in search for something to read; her heart was on fire against the young man who was giving this innocent creature such pain; it was an unreasonable anger, since he was wholly unconscious of doing so; yet if he had not behaved so ill to another

person it would not have happened, and Rose's sorrow would at least have been of a less distressing kind. Those bitter stifled sobs were each a dagger's stab to Clare's heart.

"I am glad, indeed I am glad," murmured Rose; "oh do not think me cruel to poor Hannah."

"Of course you are not cruel, my darling, nobody has been cruel except this—this scoundrel."

"Pray, don't, Clare," moaned the other, piteously. "Spare him, if it be only for my sake; oh spare poor Richard."

"Poor Richard," said Clare, contemptuously; "one would think he was a canary with a hurt wing, instead of a vicious, cruel—yes, cruel—hush, I am ashamed of you, Rose."

"Not so much as I am ashamed of myself," sobbed the unhappy girl; "you don't know what it is—the disappointment and disgrace of it—to love and not be loved."

"I can understand the disappointment well enough," said Clare, coldly; "but not the disgrace of it. And if I was in your position, I would pluck my heart out by the roots rather than suffer it to cling to an unworthy object. You have no pride, Rose; I had almost said no self-respect."

"No dear, I have no pride," answered the other, softly, "I am a poor weak girl I know; but you who are strong should have more pity on me."

"My darling, I do pity you," said Clare, hugging her sister to her heart, "I was only pretending to despise you that you might rouse up a little spirit, and be angry with me. It is because you are so gentle and so forgiving that I hate the man—I mean any man that gives you pain."

"But he does not know it, Clare; I am nothing to him, and never have been anything, though he was all the world to me."

"Not all the world, I hope, Rosie," returned the other, tenderly.

"No, no, that is very true," answered Rose, penitently. "Oh how ungrateful as well as wicked I must seem to you. I will try to forgive."

"But you say you have nothing to forgive him," put in Clare, smiling.

"Nor have I, darling; I mean Hannah. I will try to forgive Hannah."

This sentiment shocked Clare. Not that she was less inclined to forgiveness than her sister, but she had more pride. If Rose's case had been hers she might have been more angry with Rivers, but not at all with Hannah. The girl, not being on the same social plane with her, would have been beyond the range of her jealousy. This is why men of notoriously dissolute lives are not ostracised by women of their own class in life. It is bad morality, of course, but it arises, not from lenity to vice, but from an artificial civilization. It is the explanation of much that shocks the religious world in the social life of our upper class. In the uppermost there is little jealousy even of this most limited kind.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

It was after dinner that this interview between the sisters had occurred, and the shades of evening had fallen ere it was over. Mrs. Barton was with her husband in his study, knowing that his mind was more exercised about the coming marriage than he had been willing to confess, and that when in trouble her companionship was soothing to him. Clare had gone to her room, where she had thoughts of her own to occupy her, in some respects not so wholly dissimilar to those which were agitating her sister; Leicester and Avis were in the smoking-room, discussing the idyll of Richard and Hannah from quite other points of view than had presented themselves to the two young ladies. Rose, left to herself, became the victim of retrospection. Her recent behaviour, or rather the feelings that had led to it, gave her great dissatisfaction and even remorse. She had been very wrong, she reflected, to take Richard Rivers's conduct, so far as she herself was concerned, so much to heart; it showed, as Clare had said, a want of proper pride that was deplorable; but then also, as she had confessed, she had no pride, but was a poor-spirited, weak creature, of whom it was no wonder that her sister, or any one else belonging to her, should feel ashamed. Where she had been still more wrong, and had no such moral excuse to offer, was the bitterness she had felt—and shown—against Hannah Bryce. What had she got to forgive in the girl for having misbehaved herself with—with anybody? If it had not

been with—with Richard, she would have felt pity for her rather than anger. Why then, because it had been Richard, had she been angry with her? The temptation to which she had succumbed had been no less, but, as she was only too well aware, the greater. She was jealous of her; yes, hide it as she would under the mask of moral indignation, jealousy, a most ignoble jealousy, was at the bottom of it. Had not the poor girl suffered enough? nay, was she not suffering now from the consequence of her ill-behaviour, not to know, not at least to be sure, for days and days, that the wrong which had been done to her would be repaired? To sit for lonely hours, to lie awake for sleepless nights, face to face with ruin, was not that punishment enough? Yet she, forsooth, in a spirit which she flattered herself was Christian, was “to try to forgive her.” It was surely her duty rather to seek to comfort her. She had gathered from Clare that another twelve hours—a whole night of wretchedness—would elapse before the poor girl would learn what had been that day decided upon. Mrs. Barton, as we know, had enjoined upon Clare that she should pay no more visits to the Well Cottage, but no such injunction had been laid upon Rose. Why should she not go that very evening—at once—and tell her the good news, of which she stood in such sore need? Though it was a mission of charity, it was, for once, anything but a welcome one for her to undertake. No one but herself could know how painful it would be to her; but for that very reason she was the more resolved upon it. It was a reparation that she owed to the girl for her cruel and resentful thoughts of her.

Rose threw on her cloak and bonnet, went softly down the back stairs, and let herself out by a door that

opened on the garden. It was not yet night, but the evening was dark, and even if the villagers had not all retired, as it was their custom to do very early, she hoped to escape observation; her heart beat and her limbs trembled under her, as though she had been bent on some ill deed instead of a good one, but she did not doubt that it was a good one. There were two lights streaming through the windows of the Well Cottage, one above stairs and one below. She knew that there were two persons within, Hannah and Mrs. Sherwood, and this showed that they were not together; so far, it was well, since it would have been impossible for her to have spoken to Hannah upon the matter on which she had come before the nurse; it would be hard enough to do so in any case. Perhaps her coming might even be thought an interference, or perhaps the news she had to tell might be no news after all; in that case her mission would be only too likely to be taken in bad part, since it suggested a doubt of Rivers keeping faith with the girl.

She knocked at the door timidly, and Nurse Sherwood opened it; she seemed exceedingly surprised to see her. "La, Miss Rose, and what be you come about? Not as I ain't glad to see you, for it's lonesome enough here, Heavens knows."

"But where is Hannah?"

"Upstairs, where she always is. It's not a bit o' good my staying on here, not as far as company is concerned; nor can I be responsible for her, since she won't let me come anigh her."

"Responsible for her? Do you mean that there is any danger?"

This notion of a possible catastrophe froze poor Rose's blood and the very words on her lips.

"Not as to her taking her life, for she is too good a girl for that, and, moreover, that would separate her from her young man, you see, which is where her trouble lies; but I should hardly be surprised if she went out of her wits. What to one in her condition is harder to bear than aught else, is suspense. She has faith in the young man, of course—that they all have, if we are to believe what they say—but she can't understand why she has not heard from him. 'Not a line, not a word,' that is what she keeps on saying. I tell her he's at the Bell at Market Overt; but for all that, there is nothing to show for it—he may have sailed for Canada."

"He is certainly at Market Overt. It was thought better that no communication should pass between them till papa had seen Mr. Rivers, who, it seems, had agreed to that arrangement."

"Yes, he can wait *now*, no doubt," observed Nurse Sherwood, drily; that's allus the way wi' the men."

"You are doing Mr. Rivers wrong, nurse. He is willing to marry Hannah."

"Then why don't he do it?" inquired the other, sharply. "He has put it off a little late, even as it is."

It is very unusual, though Rose did not know it, for persons in Nurse Sherwood's position to take in such cases what may well be called the losing side. They generally range themselves with the gay Lothario, especially if he belongs to the "quality," and have very little sympathy with his victim. But the fact was that, during her residence at the Well Cottage, Nurse Sherwood had seen a great deal of Hannah, and was drawn towards her by regard quite as much as by pity. She understood that morally—for there are degrees even in morals—she was not of the same class with the ordinary village sinner of her sex; that, though her fall

had been no deeper, its effect upon her had been far more serious. Mrs. Sherwood's knowledge of medical science was limited, but she had heard of folks dying of a broken heart, and she verily believed that, if the only reparation which could be made to the girl was denied her, she would succumb to that malady.

What helped to make the old woman a partisan in the matter was, curiously enough, the good opinion she had hitherto formed of Rivers himself. She resented the fact that his genial ways, and absence of all social pride—nay, even his strength and carelessness of danger; for, though old, she had the weaknesses of her sex—had hitherto prejudiced her in his favour; she thought it the less wonder that Hannah had yielded herself to him, but was the more indignant against him for taking advantage, so to speak, of his advantages, and also of disproving her own judgment. She had no high opinion of young men—and especially of young gentlemen—in their relations with the fair sex, but Mr. Rivers she had thought was an exception.

It was dreadful to Rose to have to listen to her ungenerous remarks against this young man, whom, nevertheless, it was impossible she should defend. Though she had come with the express purpose of relieving the girl's mind, she had some hesitation in stating her errand to Nurse Sherwood. She felt that, as regarded her father, and the conclusion at which he had arrived, it was an act of undutifulness to reveal the matter to others, though in the girl's case pity had overruled this feeling.

"I wish to have a few words with Hannah," she said, shyly.

Nurse Sherwood looked at her very fixedly. "If you were one of the preaching sort, Miss Rose," she

replied, "I should say 'no.' I am put here in charge of the girl, and it is my duty to see that no harm is done her. She is down enough, poor soul; but you are not one to break the bruised reed."

"I am not at liberty to tell you what it is, nurse," said Rose, gently, "but I have good news for her."

"Then in Heaven's name go up and give it her, for she needs it," responded the old woman; "no angel could be more welcome to her, and to my mind," she added to herself, "you look as like one as they make 'em here below." Rose went softly upstairs, so softly that she could hear the quick beating of her tender heart, and knocked at Hannah's door. As there was no reply she opened it, and there sat the girl in her grandfather's armchair, with her hands clasped together in front of her, and her tearless eyes staring straight before her, like those of one who walks in his sleep. It would have scared Rose less if she had found her sobbing on her knees.

She took no notice of her visitor, and what her face seemed to say was that it mattered nothing to her who should come, since it was not the one person in the world that she longed to see.

"Hannah—Hannah, dear," said Rose, gently; "I have got good news for you—news that you expected, of course, and which you would have had to-morrow, at all events; but I thought you ought to have it at once."

"News, what news?" the girl started from her chair with one trembling hand upon her heart, and the other stretched out in piteous pleading.

"There is only one thing that can be good news to me. Oh, Miss Rose, you will have pity even for one like me. Have you come from Richard? Oh, if you

knew how I love him, and how—I think—he still loves me.”

Perhaps it was fortunate that she thus spoke of her lover, for her manner of doing so struck Rose with such a painful sense of incongruity, not unwholly un-mixed with personal resentment, that it overcame her inclination to “break down” and dissolve in sympathetic tears.

“I have not seen Mr. Rivers,” she answered, quietly, “but my father has seen him, and it is arranged that you are to be married in Leadon Church on Friday morning.”

Hannah fell on her knees with an inarticulate cry of joy, and burst into tears. The tears stood still in her visitor's eyes and would have fallen, but for a certain unjustifiable indignation to which she would never have confessed. It seemed to her that this emotion of Hannah's, which in truth was half hysterical, had been caused by a want of confidence in Rivers's sense of right. She could not know, of course, that Nurse Sherwood, with the best intention, and in order to break the blow which she herself had fully anticipated, had all along besought the girl to make up her mind for the worst.

“Did you then believe that your—your lover had deserted you, Hannah?”

“No, oh no,” she sobbed. “But I thought his father might have forbidden him to—to keep his promise, and rather than have been Richard's ruin, I had been trying—oh, so hard, Miss Rose—to bear my own.”

“My poor, poor girl,” said Rose, and with her tender heart shining in her eyes, she stooped down to kiss her.

“No, no,” said the girl, shrinking away from her embrace, “you must not do that; I am not fit for such

as you to kiss. You are good and pure, and I—ask any one in Leadon, and they will tell you what I am. It was like you to come here with your good news; Death will have no terrors for you as it had for me, when awhile ago I thought to seek it; but when you come to die, you will be glad to remember how you came to comfort a poor fallen girl without a friend."

This was quite Nurse Sherwood's view, though she expressed it differently to her young charge, when their visitor had gone away. "We are told that at the resurrection we shall all be changed, and a most of us will require a good deal of changing, afore we are fit for the society of the Heavenly Host, but as to Miss Rose, she will not need it, for she is an angel already."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GROWING CLOUD.

THE secret of the approaching marriage—considering it was known to many persons, and among them at least four of the fair sex—was, as regards the general public, well kept. What assisted this desirable state of things was not only the express command of Mr. Barton, but the wholly unexpected character of the event. The villagers did not think it at all probable that a young gentleman in Rivers's position would willingly wed the girl; when a similar "misfortune" happened in their own rank of life, such reparation was common enough, but they well understood that circumstances alter cases. The women folk especially thought it out of the question, and felt that it ought

to be so. There was much less sympathy for Hannah among them, with a few exceptions such as Nurse Sherwood, than among the men. They looked upon her not so much as a "shocking example," as a warning to their own girls.

Not a few of them ascribed her disgrace to her superior knowledge: they had never heard of the "higher education," but readily subscribed to the dictum that even a little learning was a dangerous thing, and if they had a different opinion of it after the wedding, it was one of the few good results that were evolved from it at Leadon.

Even the best natured of the villagers were far from pleased when they came to know the truth, but this was mainly because they had missed the ceremony. It took place early in the morning, without the glad intimation from the bell-ringers, who were not informed of it themselves, and were more indignant in consequence than anybody.

The Parson and the clerk, the bride and the bridegroom, and Nurse Sherwood, who (rather superfluously) gave the bride away, were the only persons present at the ceremony. Mr. Avis's grave proposal that he should act as "best man" was not accepted by his tutor. "If I did not think you utterly incapable of regarding any subject in a serious light," he said, "I should say that nothing could be in worse taste than such a suggestion."

The joker revenged himself upon Leicester by reiterated inquiries as to what he was going to give the bridegroom for a marriage present, and many poetical quotations of a hymeneal character. There were of course no presents, and when the fly came to take Mr. and Mrs. Rivers to the railway station neither slipper

nor rice were thrown at them. Someone watched it, however, from behind her bedroom blind, at the Rectory, till it had climbed the long, steep hill and disappeared, and, as it did so, she felt that a part of her life went with it.

Mr. Barton had held out his hand, if somewhat stiffly, to the newly-married pair, and Rivers pressed it with a few words of grateful affection, but Hannah only raised it to her lips in silence. She was cold and pale as a statue throughout the scene,—a marble bride, even when her husband's glance evoked the love light from her eyes.

"I must say," confessed Mr. Barton to his wife, "that it was a most interesting wedding, though I am glad it is all over and done with."

"The post has come in, John, since you left, and there is a letter for you from Lord Ripton," returned Mrs. Barton. It was no reply to his remark, yet it seemed from her tone to have some connection with it.

"He can have nothing to say to the matter, one way or the other," observed her husband with a little burst of irritation; but he opened the letter with some little anxiety, nevertheless.

Lord Ripton it seemed had a good deal to say.

SIR,—I beg to acknowledge your favour of the 14th inst.

"Good Heavens," ejaculated Mr. Barton, "what a beginning." He had not noticed the address at the head of the letter, which was that of a great company in the city of which his lordship was chairman. When he wrote from there his correspondence had always a commercial style.

Its contents have filled me with amazement, and I must add indignation. That my son should be so resolutely determined to

make a marriage disgraceful to himself and to all belonging to him, is deplorable indeed, but to those who are acquainted with his previous history, not unhappily incredible; but that you, a clergyman, and *in loco parentis*, should aid and abet him in so discreditable a proceeding, even to the extent of performing the marriage ceremony, surpasses belief. In acting as you have done you have shown yourself utterly unworthy of the confidence I placed in you, nor is it, indeed, too much to say,—since as I gather from the tone of your letter you are at heart a leveller of all social distinctions,—that you obtained that confidence under false pretences. You were recommended to me for your post as a man of honour, doubtless by persons as ignorant of your real character as myself; but it will be henceforth my duty to enlighten them as well as any of my acquaintances who may fall into the same error upon that matter.

I remain, sir,

Your obedient servant,

RIPTON.

“Did you ever know anything so monstrous and unreasonable?” exclaimed Mr. Barton, who had read this effusion aloud, in a voice of the utmost astonishment. “The man must be out of his mind. There is no other explanation of it.”

“I think he is more out of temper than out of his mind, John,” replied Mrs. Barton, gently; “but unhappily, as regards ourselves, that is the same thing.”

“But you do not suppose that he can really do us any harm,” observed her husband. “Lord Ripton’s character is pretty well understood, as I hope my own is, and any malicious statements he may make concerning me will be taken at their proper value.”

“Still,—though of course you did right in what you did, John,—you did marry this young couple.”

“Well, of course.” At the time the tutor said no more, but he remembered the apprehensions that his wife had expressed in the matter, and thanked her in

his heart for not alluding to them. It would have been a great temptation to many a woman,—even good ones,—to say, “Did I not tell you so?” But Mrs. Barton was so peculiarly constituted that she preferred to conceal the candle of her own good sense under the bushel of consideration for the feelings of others. She was of those who do not live for themselves, but for those they love; she had less intelligence, perhaps, than instinct, but this was marvellously quickened in the presence of danger to her dear ones,—a wife not only for the marriage bed, but (which is rarer) for the sick bed, and even for the death bed.

Rivers's departure made a serious gap in life at the Rectory, and the more so since no allusion could be made to it. It is something, when a friend leaves us, that we can talk of him regretfully, discuss his virtues or even his weaknesses, and keep his memory green; but to feel that his name is not to be mentioned adds a pang to the sense of loss. The cheerful voice of this young fellow, though seldom heard, was missed at meal times and in the garden; there was a certain wholesomeness about him which, being withdrawn, felt like the absence of fresh air; there was nobody who could be so depended upon for the carrying out of any scheme of pleasure, or who brought so large a contribution of good nature to it. He had not only dragged down upon his own head the pillars of domestic peace, but, worse even than in Samson's case, upon those of his friends: and unhappily this was only the beginning of it.

Mrs. Barton, like a sensible woman, endeavoured to forget her forebodings in occupation. She gave orders for the preparation of the rooms for the new pupils whose arrival was immediately expected. They would

be welcome in many ways, but she felt it would be some time, if at all, before they could fill the place of Rivers. It was one of the disagreeables of her husband's calling, that no sooner had the family become accustomed to a pupil, and learnt to like him, than he had to leave them. He did not forget them indeed; Mr. Barton's name was a "household word" in many a family of distinction, but it is doubtful whether, in what eventually took place, this was an advantage to him. Whatever happened in connection with him was talked of in many households connected with one another, or moving in the same circles, and ill news flies at least as fast as good news. Within three days of Lord Ripton's passionate letter, the vindictiveness of which he had not understood, came the following communication from Sir James Leicester :

MY DEAR MR. BARTON,—I have heard news from a quarter that I fear must be well informed, which gives me great anxiety of mind about my son. I am told that one of your pupils has contracted a *mesalliance* with one of your parishioners, and that you yourself have performed the marriage ceremony between them. This is a circumstance so entirely unexpected from the opinion I have always held of your character that I should, if it were possible, have disbelieved it. I must, however, as the case stands, take the truth of it for granted. My dear Guy, I am sure, is the last person to so forget himself as to indulge in a vulgar intrigue; but the influence of example and association, at his time of life, is very great, and I feel it my duty to withdraw him from its possible danger. Both he and I have, I am sure, very much to thank you for, and I am sincerely grieved to sever his connection with you, but I must beg that, as soon as it can be conveniently arranged, he may leave Leadon for home. It is possible that I am over-anxious; but I am in very ill health, and cannot bear distress of mind of any kind; indeed, before this ill news reached me, I was in some doubt as to whether I should not curtail my son's stay with you from a selfish wish to have him

with me. It is, however, with most sincere regret that I am thus compelled to anticipate his return home. With very kind regards to Mrs. Barton, I remain, yours truly,

INNES LEICESTER.

P.S.—I inclose a letter for my son, in which you may be sure I have said nothing to give you pain or weaken the friendly relations between you.

"This is Lord Ripton's work," observed Mr. Barton, bitterly, when he had read the letter. "It has indeed been thoroughly done." A sinking of the heart which he could not resist oppressed him; the thing was bad in itself, but of worse augury; if Sir Innes Leicester took this view of what had happened, a man who had so often expressed confidence in him, and with whom his relations had been unusually close and friendly, the world at large would probably take a still more unfavourable one. He saw the shadow of ruin already projected upon his future; his delicate wife in poverty, his dear girls unprovided for, his occupation gone. It was a cruel moment, and not the less so because he had a secret consciousness that he had himself to thank for it, at least as much as Lord Ripton. His lip curled in bitter scorn as he reflected that it was not the sin of his son that had excited his lordship's wrath, but its reparation. If Richard had not married the girl he would have thought little about the matter. In all that he himself had done he felt justified, except, indeed, in having performed the ceremony. If Mr. Giles, for example, had married them, all might have been well, or nearly well; he had done it with a good intention, but he had allowed himself to be swayed by sentiment, perhaps even by impulse; he had committed a great mistake; Heaven grant it might not prove a fatal one.

CHAPTER XXIV.

POOR CLARE.

IF concealment of Sir Innes's letter had been possible to Mr. Barton he would have concealed it; he would have done anything to save his wife from pain. But at the best of course he could only delay the miserable news, and even that would have been difficult. Her eyes were too keen not to discover that he was in trouble, however careful he might be to hide it; and his nature was very demonstrative. This is not necessarily a disadvantage to a man. It may harm him now and then, but on the whole he makes more friends by it—who are worth making—than he loses. A friend, says the Scripture, must *show* himself friendly, and this Mr. Barton had done with good results. He had not worn his heart on his sleeve, exactly, but it had been visible to men, and especially to women. To those who were dear to him it was open as the day. His pupils never knew when things annoyed him, unless the annoyance proceeded from themselves, but his wife knew, always. It was quite unnecessary that he should inform her of the fact. And when she knew it, it somehow seemed to him that the trouble was gone. She never showed that she had taken it on her own shoulders, but it was there. That was why Mrs. Barton, though still upright as a dart, was not quite so strong as she had been, and less active than she would have wished to be. Mr. Barton's troubles had hitherto been not very serious, and had left no mark upon him; but

this was not quite so with his wife. She had been of late years anxious about their future—not her own—for she never gave a thought to it—but that of her husband, and what it included, that of his girls. His disposition was more sanguine, perhaps too much inclined to adopt that easy-going motto, “sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,” but now, and all the more that he had ignored it, the thought “If I lose my pupils, I lose all,” had struck like a barbed arrow to his heart. He well knew that it would strike to hers, whether she owned it or not, and it was his hand that must loose the string. Still he flattered himself that it might not be necessary to tell her all.

“I have had a letter, my dear, from Sir Innes this morning, with bad news in it,” was the way he introduced the subject; “he is in failing health, he says, and feels the want of his son’s companionship; so Guy is to leave us.” Her face did not cloud over, as that of most persons will do when they receive ill tidings, but it paled. She could avoid looking sorrowful, but she could not control that other manifestation.

“I am sorry indeed,” she said, gently; “it seems very sudden. May I see the letter?” It was not his custom to withhold his letters from her, if they had any interest for him, since in that case they had interest for her.

“Sir Innes must surely be much worse, John,” she continued; “in his last letter he only described himself as out of sorts. Of course we should be sorry to lose Guy on all accounts. But, as far as the money is concerned, he would have left us next year at all events. And you have two new pupils coming.”

“If they come,” said her husband, desperately. His heart had reproached him for having deceived her, though

it had been meant in kindness ; and now, in the distress and turmoil of his mind, he thought it kinder to prepare her for the worst.

"If they come? Why should they not come? Oh, John, you are concealing something from me!" He could not resist the pathos of those words.

"Well, dear, it may not after all be of much consequence, but Sir Innes gave another reason for withdrawing his son. It is Lord Ripton's doings, I feel certain, and I have only myself to thank for giving him the opportunity of making mischief."

"A man of that kind does not need to have it given him," she said, with the nearest approach to bitterness of which her sweet soul was capable. "He takes it. He is a horrid man."

"I ought to have known as much. I have behaved like a fool," returned her husband.

"No, you have not ; you have behaved like a Christian and a gentleman, if, as I suppose, this has arisen from Mr. Rivers's marriage."

"Say rather from my marrying him. Giles could have done it just as well, but I thought it would be better for the girl, when I ought to have been thinking it might be the worse for you. If it was I only who had to suffer, I should say I am properly punished."

"We are never punished for doing what is right, John," said Mrs. Barton, confidently.

He shook his head, and smiled bitterly. It was she who had become the priest, and he the infidel.

"We must not tell the girls, John ; I mean as regards the reason. But, of course, they must know that Guy is going. Hush, here they are!"

The husband and wife were in the morning-room, where Clare and Rose now joined them. They saw by

their parents' faces that something was amiss, and, with simultaneous sympathy, exclaimed, "What is the matter?" Mr. Barton could not trust himself to speak. He knew, too, that his wife would say what was to be said far better than he; she had a way with her girls that was beyond his powers. He loved them dearly, but was secretly a little afraid of them, as is the case with most fathers; and he quitted the room, leaving to his wife the disagreeable task, as is the way with most husbands.

"Sir Innes is ill, and has sent for his son to come home," she said, sorrowfully enough, but quite naturally.

"How very sorry I am!" said Rose. "Not only on Mr. Leicester's account, but our own. We all like him so, do we not?"

If Clare liked him she did not say so; she only looked out of the window, sad and silent; but her regard was taken for granted.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Barton. "I have never liked any pupil from first to last so well."

This phrase, from first to last, as Rose recognised with a quick flush, had reference to another pupil, who up till lately had been Mrs. Barton's favourite. But he had done for himself in her eyes, though not perhaps, badly as he had behaved, in all eyes.

"It will be very dreadful," said Clare, suddenly, "to be left with nobody but Mr. Avis." It was scarcely a remark on a level with the occasion, and especially coming from such a source. It was not Clare's way to take much notice of Mr. Avis's existence, and it seemed strange both to her mother and sister that she should have alluded to him in connection with the subject under consideration.

"So far as that goes, there are two new pupils com-

ing who may be better specimens of their class," remarked Rose, with unwonted cynicism. The fact was that pupils had no longer any interest for her, and she resented, perhaps, not only on Leicester's account, her sister's reference to them.

"And when are they coming?" inquired Clare, with the air of one who speaks to keep up a conversation rather than from curiosity.

"No date has been named; but almost immediately I believe," replied Mrs. Barton, and she flushed up a little from the consciousness that she had almost said, "I hope."

"I suppose Mr. Leicester knows about it—I mean that he is to leave us?"

"I am not sure; but, of course, your father will have to tell him at once. I am afraid he will be sorry to go."

It was characteristic of the speaker to so express herself. Her thoughts were always for others, but Rose rather resented this way of putting it; she was soft enough as regarded one pupil, but, strange to say, that made her hard with respect to the others. It was quite right to regret Mr. Leicester's departure; but how little had been thought, or at least said, of that of Rivers. "Well, of course, he will be sorry, as, indeed, he ought to be. I am sure papa and you and all of us have done our best to please him. Have we not, Clare?"

"I suppose so, yes," replied her sister; she was always less demonstrative than Rose, but on this occasion she certainly showed less feeling than usual. Her mother did not observe it; her thoughts were fixed on more serious matters, about which she must needs be silent. Rose thought it "odd."

"Well, I must make altogether new arrangements," said Mrs. Barton, with a pretence of briskness. "There

will now be no new room wanted for either of the new pupils." She rose from her chair and took up her basket of keys. What she really wanted was to rejoin her husband and to read Sir Innes's letter, if perchance some scraps of comfort might be found in it, and, above all, to cheer her dear one, who stood in such sore need of cheering.

There was another, too, under that roof, who was even more utterly cast down, and had no comforter; too proud to tell her sacred secret to any one, and resolved to keep it to her life's end. The sudden shock of the tidings she had just heard had been almost too much for her; her coldness and indifference had not been assumed, but were as the rigidity of death. The springs of her life seemed frozen. For Clare Barton had loved Guy Leicester from the first day she saw him, and she thought, nay she knew, that her love was returned. They had never spoken of it to one another for many reasons, but that was unnecessary because it was so well understood. "Love's young dream" had seemed to both of them incapable of realisation; there were obstacles on both sides, in the inequality of their fortunes, and in the pride of their fathers, arising from very different sources, but as great on one side as the other, which they felt in their times of reflection were insurmountable; but they could not help loving one another nevertheless. Distrustful of his own merit, modest, shy as he was, Guy had revealed his secret to her long ago; but he knew it must remain a secret between her and him, or they would have been sundered at once and for ever.

That was what had caused Avis's remarks about his being in love to move him so; that astute young gentleman had detected him, but most fortunately had

attributed his devotion to the younger sister instead of the elder. Had his guess been more correct, Guy's existence at Leadon, under Avis's eye, would have been intolerable. Clare, of course, knew nothing of that matter, or the sprightly Avis would have been hateful indeed to her. She only knew that that separation, which would have been the result of their mutual affection being known, had now come upon them independently of that revelation. Though in her sister's trouble she had given her all the comfort in her power, she would not have admitted for a moment that their cases were identical; she even thought her deficient in self-respect to have cherished an affection which was so obviously not returned; nor even in her own, much more excusable position, would she have confided it to any human being. Even when on some pretences she had sought as soon as possible the silence and solitude of her own room, the anguish of her soul did not express itself in tears or prayers; there was no casting herself on her couch nor on her knees, but when the door was locked behind her, she remained upright, stiff as a statue and as white, like one who, feeling death approach, elects to meet it standing.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RATS FLY FROM THE SINKING SHIP.

SIR INNES had left the letter he had inclosed to his son unsealed, perhaps with the intention that Mr. Barton should read it (which, however, he never dreamt of doing), or, perhaps, as an assurance that he had written no more than the truth in saying that he had

communicated nothing to Guy respecting his tutor of an unpleasant nature ; but, at all events, the circumstance was agreeable to Mr. Barton. He felt, indeed, no ill-will to Sir Innes at all, nor did he even blame him. From his point of view—a man of wealth and great estate, alarmed for the future of his only son—his conduct was only too intelligible. It was necessary, however, since the letter was open, to give it into Guy's own hands, which was a little embarrassing. He accordingly summoned the young man to the study.

"I am sorry to say, Leicester, I have bad news from your father. He is ill ; not very ill, since he has written to you, you see, with his own hand ; but he wishes to have you about him, and therefore, of course, to leave us."

"To leave Leadon ! Oh, sir, I trust not that ; at least, not soon ; I mean immediately." Always shy and nervous, the young man's manner now was painfully so. His voice trembled, his hand shook as he took the letter, and even then he awaited Mr. Barton's reply before reading it.

"Well, you will see what he says. From what he has written to me, I fear it is so."

"My father is not very ill, I trust," said Guy, when he had read the note, which was a very short one, "but only feels weak and lonely, which makes him wish for my companionship."

"Does he give no other reason ?"

"No, sir, none. Of course, I must go ; but the matter is evidently not urgent ; he says, 'As soon as is convenient to your good tutor.'"

"It is very kind of him to so express himself," said Mr. Barton, and, indeed, he felt that it was very kind. "But there is no reason for delay. Your duty and mine

is plain, though we shall be sorry to lose you so much sooner than we had expected."

"And I, sir, shall be so sorry to go; so much more sorry than you have any idea of; that is, I mean," he hastened to add, as though correcting himself, "you have all been so kind to me."

"Not kinder than you deserve, Leicester. I have had no fault to find with you, which can be said of few pupils. You have all our regards, and something more. We shall miss you very much."

Mr. Barton knew that Guy Leicester was a kind-hearted fellow, very susceptible of affection, and grateful for courtesies he might reasonably have taken as a right, but the young man's evident emotion surprised and touched him. If his mind had not been pre-occupied with his own forebodings, he might have noticed a certain hesitation in his pupil's manner, as though he had something to say, but had his doubts about saying it.

"But you will not send me away at once, sir, I hope?" said the young fellow, with, as it seemed to his companion, an almost ludicrous persistence.

"I am not sending you away at all, Leicester," answered Mr. Barton, smiling; "your father is withdrawing you. It would not be right to delay your departure for more than a week, but since, as Sir Innes is so good as to write 'at my convenience,' let us say a week, though that will be making his permission a little elastic."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" returned the young man, with a sort of simple gratitude, like a boy who has been given a holiday, but he looked like a man who, being condemned to immediate execution, has been granted a reprieve.

It was with no pleasant feelings, however, that Lei-

cester retired. Like most of us who have got what we wanted, it seemed to him little enough, and, indeed, though he had feared that Mr. Barton would say "To-morrow," a week was not a long respite. Nor was it fated to be an enjoyable one. The sympathy of the family, expressed in the kindest way, or signified (in one instance) in a still more tender though silent fashion, delighted but depressed him; while that of his remaining companion in the pupil-room, though well meant, was not so agreeable.

"I am very sorry you are going, old fellow," said Avis, "and, of course, for the reason of it. As your governor doesn't seem to be very bad, I wish, however, he would have spared you till Christmas. It is not likely I shall get on with these two new beggars as I have done with you. Still, you are not going away for misbehaviour like Rivers, nor, as I feared had been the case, on account of Miss Rose's tenderness for you. It should be a comfort to you that old Bart has not found *that* out."

As in the children's game of "Hide and seek," when, though you have not discovered the hidden article, they say "You are burning," so Avis had come very near the truth, only it was Leicester who was burning.

"There is nothing to blush about, old fellow," continued the other, "and, of course, your secret is quite safe with me. Neither your governor nor her governor would listen to such an idea for the moment at present, but there is no knowing what may happen in time to anybody. Think of Hannah Bryce being at this moment the Honourable Mrs. Rivers! By jingo, it's as good as a play! It is like the 'Lord of Burleigh,' only she will not succumb

To the burthen of an honour unto which she was not born,

because she is a deuced sensible young woman ; nor, indeed, is he likely to succeed to Burleigh. You may depend upon it old Ripton is in a devil of a rage about it for all that : I know it from what I know my Uncle Pud would feel under the same circumstances. I always think that it was a mistake, in working up the misfortunes of Job, that he was not given an Uncle Pud-dock ; and governors are just as bad."

"I don't know about that," said Leicester, coldly ; "but I do assure you you are entirely wrong in supposing that Miss Rose has any tenderness for your humble servant."

"Tut, tut ; have I no eyes or ears in my head ? Now the next time she speaks to you what I call significantly, with a drop in her voice and the tears near her eyes, as I have seen them, I'll kick you under the table."

"You had better not," said Leicester, desperately. Certainly Avis was not the sort of person to sympathise with poor Leicester's departing regrets.

He was not a bad fellow, outside of his vulgarity, but what affected him most in the matter was, naturally enough, the withdrawal of a companion that suited him tolerably well—for he liked Leicester much better than Leicester liked him—and the substitution of two strangers in his place. It was probable, indeed, that he would now take his proper place in the household, and become first favourite instead of third.

This soothing reflection, however, was fated to be but short-lived. On the very next afternoon, a fly from the railway station drew up at the Rectory door, and from it nimbly emerged a little fat old man, who rang the bell with a very unusual violence.

As the butler who answered the summons subsequently observed of it, "One would have thought the

house was on fire." Mrs. Barton, though she happened to be in the housekeeper's room, which was in the back premises, was startled by it, and instantly felt the presage of misfortune. With her hand on her beating heart, she listened, and from the distant hall she heard the words "Is Mr. Barton at home?" given in a strange voice, of much sharpness. Then the visitor was ushered into the study.

"Who was that gentleman, Robert?" she inquired, with assumed indifference, of the servant.

"I could hardly catch his name, ma'am, he spoke so quick and impatient like, but I think it was Puddock. His business seemed very pressing."

Poor Mrs. Barton knew what his business was as well as though she had been told it; but if she had known how he was going to tell it, the pain she felt upon her husband's account would have been acuter still. It is an error to suppose that all fat people are good-natured, but most of them look so, and Mr. Puddock, on ordinary occasions, was no exception to the rule. When he was lending money, which was his business, his looks were smiling, his manner genial, his face looked like a cherub (which he also reminded you of in other ways), but when he was asking for it again, and there was any hitch, this resemblance was not so marked; he looked like Vitellius, when he had been kept waiting for his dinner; his brows were knit, and underneath them his sharp little black eyes had rather a menacing expression. They wore it now, as he entered hastily into Mr. Barton's study, and held out to him two fingers of his pudgy hand. This was a mark of salutation to which the tutor was not accustomed, and he resented it.

"This is indeed an unexpected visit, Mr. Puddock," he said, "pray take a chair."

"Unexpected!" returned the visitor, with something very like a sneer. "I should have thought you would have been used to such visits by this time. I have reason to believe that I am not the first nor yet the second—but perhaps they have only written to you. That is not my way; I don't let my hay wait for the wet to come. I look after things myself." The speaker's words were not gracious, but his manner was more objectionable still—the manner of a man with £10,000 a year to a man with £500 who is his debtor; of one who has been annoyed, or stands in danger of being annoyed, by an inferior.

The tutor had plenty of spirit; he had never stood with bated breath before any man; if his patrons had not been his friends they would not have been his patrons; he was incapable of cringing to anyone however exalted; and what perhaps especially aroused his indignation at this treatment, he had a contempt both for his companion and his calling. "I am entirely at a loss, Mr. Puddock, to understand your meaning, or the cause of all this excitement."

"That's strange. I should have thought Lord Ripton had prepared you for it; you were at no loss to understand *him*, I'll warrant. To be plain, however, he tells me that you have persuaded his son to marry a loose wench in your own village, and even performed the ceremony yourself. Why the thing might have happened to my nephew!"

"Well, it did not happen to your nephew."

Mr. Puddock blew—no other word expresses it—he blew like a porpoise; to be met in this way, when he had looked for slavish apologies and excuses (which he had no intention of taking), deprived him for the moment of speech.

"No, sir," at last he blurted out, "and I'll take precious good care it don't happen. I'm come here to give you notice that Robert leaves you at Christmas."

"You shall take him away with you at once," said Mr. Barton, with his hand on the bell.

"No, sir," answered the other, with a cunning look. "I am not going to pay for a quarter's keep and tuition for nothing."

The tutor had no very strong sense of humour, but he had some; he could not have been so successful in his vocation without it. Angry as he was, this characteristic remark tickled him; it also reminded him, none too soon, of the sort of man he was dealing with; was it worth while, he reflected, to be put out of temper by such a person?

"As to Mr. Avis's quarter's keep," he replied, "we will cry quits about that. You can take him away with you without any detriment of that kind."

"Well, now, I must say that's liberal," said Mr. Puddock, in a greatly modified tone; he had made a rapid calculation in his mind of the sum thus saved, and it had given him considerable satisfaction. "The fact is, it would be deuced inconvenient to me to take the lad with me. I'm going to London, and young men are better—or at least not so bad—out of London. That is generally," added Mr. Puddock, with the thought of the Hon. Richard Rivers's escapade in his mind. "Let us say on Friday, then, if that will be convenient."

"Friday will be perfectly convenient."

"Thanks; I am glad this little matter has been settled without unpleasantry. It has given me much distress, I do assure you, to be compelled——"

"Perhaps you would like to see your nephew," interposed Mr. Barton, coldly.

"No; I don't think I care about that. I shall be interrupting his studies, and I shall see quite enough of him after Friday. I hope Mrs. Barton and the family are well; you are not looking very well yourself, I am sorry to see."

"Thank you, I am quite well, Mr. Puddock." But this was not at all the case. The events of the last few days, and still more the thought of the days that might be coming, had had their effect upon the tutor; he looked and felt years older. His constitution, never very strong, had already suffered from the shock of misfortune. Some people succumb to "shock" much more easily and rapidly than others. It would almost seem that something of this kind was passing through the brain of Mr. Puddock. He looked at his host earnestly and curiously, but with a sort of pity.

"I am afraid, Mr. Barton," he said, "this affair of young Rivers will do you a good deal of harm. I will not say deservedly, for we have had our little disagreement out, and I bear no malice. But what you have done is alarming to parents and guardians; and Rip-ton's devilish angry, and, between ourselves, inclined to be nasty about it. Mr. Beaumont is a connection of his——"

Mr. Barton gave a start and a shiver, in spite of himself. Beaumont was the name of one of his two expected pupils, and the other, Beresford, was Beaumont's cousin,

"Well, of course I am not sure," said Mr. Puddock, "but my impression is that Mr. Beaumont will not send his son to you, as he intended to do."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Mr. Barton, huskily.

"So am I to say it, for you have behaved very liberally; and if I can ever do you a good turn, I'll do it."

And now I think I'll be off; I gave myself twenty-five minutes to get this little matter over, and we have kept time beautifully, and I shall just catch the up express. Good-bye, sir." Mr. Puddock held out his hand this time, and Mr. Barton fortunately for himself as it turned out, though, indeed, he hardly knew he was accepting friendship's offering, took it and shook it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST RAT.

IT was rather unfortunate for Mr. Barton—though in view of such misfortunes, as it was now only too certain were impending, it mattered but little—that Mr. Puddock's desire to catch his train had prevented his interviewing his nephew, and giving him a personal explanation of what had brought him in such hot haste to Leadon. The tutor had now to do this himself, which was not an agreeable task. He resolved to perform it at once, partly from a wish to get it over, but chiefly because it delayed the narration to his wife of Mr. Puddock's visit; what had seemed humorous about it seemed so no longer; he felt in his heart of hearts that it presaged ruin.

Mr. Avis, summoned to his tutor's presence, at once perceived that something serious was amiss; he was under no apprehension on his own account, and had the intelligence to understand that, if the affair had concerned himself only, Mr. Barton's countenance would have expressed less sorrow than anger. This young gentleman was, as he himself would have expressed it,

"as clever as paint," and remarkably free from illusions even respecting his own importance.

"You have heard, I suppose, Avis," said Mr. Barton, with a ghost of a smile, "that your uncle has been here?"

"I heard him, sir," was the quick reply, delivered without the movement of a muscle,—

"His manners had not that repose
That marks the cast of Vere de Vere."

"Hush, hush; you must not be disrespectful, sir. At all events he is as solicitous about the future of his nephew as though you were born to a dukedom; Rivers's marriage has, it seems, alarmed him, lest you should also make a *mesalliance*. He thinks there may be infection in the Leadon air, and, in short, I regret to say you are to leave us on Friday, Mr. Avis."

"I am very sorry to hear it, sir; very sorry," returned the young man, with a most unusual gravity. His voice, too, had a note of sympathy in it which, to say the least, was wholly unexpected. As regards material matters and business affairs, the pupil knew more than the tutor; he had been brought up in a keener atmosphere, such as plays about the mountain range of the Main Chance, and he guessed at once all the facts of Mr. Barton's position, both present and future.

"Then there is no more the matter with Leicester's governor than there is with me," was his immediate reflection. "We pupils are all to go for fear we should marry the housemaids. And what will poor old Bart do without us?" With all his brusqueness and vulgarity, he had a kind heart; he knew that he was not a favourite with the Barton family, but that did not prevent him from pitying their position.

"I do hope, sir, my uncle will reconsider this matter," he said, gently.

"There is not the remotest chance of it," observed Mr. Barton.

Avis was quite aware of this. "Uncle Pud," as he had often remarked to his young friends, "was as obstinate as a pig." Moreover he had invested his interest in his nephew, not from personal affection, of which he had very little to spare for anybody, but because he *was* his nephew, and he was extremely solicitous about his investments.

"Then I think it's extremely hard both upon me and you, sir."

A faint flush came into the tutor's face; it was not a speech, considering their relative positions, that the young man ought to have made; but though he had no delicacy, Mr. Barton gave him credit—and not unjustly—for good feeling. "It is always difficult," he replied, "to understand apprehensions that we do not share. Your uncle has his reasons for acting as he does, which doubtless were sufficient; and it is your duty—and mine, of course—to obey them. We must part, I am afraid, on Friday."

"I am sorry, sir," reiterated the young man, and with an inclination of the head, which, if it had not much grace in it, expressed genuine emotion, he left the room. Almost immediately Mrs. Barton entered.

"What have you been saying to Mr. Avis, my dear?" she inquired, cheerfully. "He looked as if he was going to cry." Then, unable to ignore the sorrow in her husband's face, she added, gravely, "I suppose he is going to leave us."

"Yes, he is the last pupil I shall ever have."

"Oh, John, it is surely not so bad, as that; there is Mr. Beauchamp and Mr. Beresford."

"They will not come, either of them. Mr. Puddock

has told me as much; we might just as well face the fact at once."

"Then at least, John, let us face it together. Why did you not send for me, when Mr. Puddock had gone, instead of Mr. Avis? I have been suffering agonies—not of suspense, for I guessed too well what has happened—but of jealousy."

"Were you jealous?" replied Mr. Barton, with a faint smile.

"It hurt me, John, that you should choose to bear your sorrow alone. Mr. Avis could have waited awhile. You should not have seen him till you had spoken to me. It must have been such a painful scene for you."

"Avis behaved well, very well, my dear, and showed a good deal of feeling. I am glad he was sorry to go."

"They are all sorry to go, John. You have done your duty by them, and have nothing to reproach yourself with; and you will yet have your reward."

"Let us hope so, if you think I deserve it," he answered, bitterly, "though at present the blessing has come uncommonly well disguised."

"Do not let us be ungrateful, John," she answered, softly. "We have been very happy together, you and I, and fairly prosperous. Though the clouds are gathering overhead, I believe there is sunshine behind them still."

"So long as you are with me, there will be always sunshine," said Mr. Barton, tenderly; but, though it was happiness to hear him say so, she would have preferred other words from his lips just now, words of hope and confidence, some hint at what their mode of life must be under altered circumstances—some sign, in fact, of vitality, and not the mere resignation to the inevitable. He was not one to lose his manhood in the

face of danger, and what pained her most was the conviction that his despondency arose from the reflection that he had brought this sorrow upon them with his own hands. So kind and pure of heart, so responsive to the touch of nature and of right, was it his fault that he had been unable to forecast the views of meaner men, the Riptons and the Puddocks? Such was the balm wherewith his wife strove to heal his wound.

But, as he truly replied, there was Sir Innes, a man of stainless honour, a true gentleman, incapable of being poisoned by a malignant tongue; that he had aroused Sir Innes's fears was proof that his conduct had not been blameless.

In the meantime, Avis had told the story of his interview with "old Bart" to Leicester, after his own fashion. Genuinely touched by his tutor's woes, but compelled to moderation of speech and manner by his presence, it was a relief to him to have escaped from it, and to resume his natural tone of frivolity and persiflage. Leicester gathered from him the nature of the misfortune that had befallen their host, but not the seriousness of its consequences. His heart felt for the whole family, and for one of them it bled. The idea that Clare might be inconvenienced by narrow means was distressing to him to the last degree. With actual poverty he was unable to associate her. His father's position was, he knew, very different from that of *her* father; but still, except as to luxuries and splendour, one seemed to live much as the other. If Lazarus is absolutely shoeless, Dives comprehends his position, but he does not see where the shoe of poverty pinches; and this ignorance—rather than selfish indifference—is often the cause of deplorable sins of omission. Avis was much better informed upon this subject, and thoroughly

understood the difference between income and "un-earned increment."

"If poor old Bart's pupils go, you see, then all is gone."

"What do you mean by *all*?" exclaimed Leicester, rising in agitation from his chair. "Of course it will reduce his income."

"It will indeed; it will be what he was explaining to us the other day, a *reductio ad absurdum*. If he has a thousand pounds of his own, it is as much as he's got."

"With their simple tastes, I suppose the family would get on upon that," observed Leicester.

"With simple tastes, and also very small appetites, and no objection to living in the open air, they might perhaps," said Avis, scornfully. "Is it possible you imagine they will have a thousand *a year*?"

"I thought you said so," said Leicester, blankly.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed the other, looking upward as though appealing to Olympus, "here is a man who does not know the difference between principal and interest! How Uncle Pud will smack his lips over you if you ever do business with him. A thousand pounds, you innocent babe, is, at present rates, just £40 a year, and that is about all poor Bart will have to live on if he gets no pupils."

"Forty pounds a year!" replied Leicester, in a tone that made that respectable sum sound like forty pence. "It is simply horrible," and like one who could bear no more he walked straight out of the room.

The news of the flight of the pupils was not long in reaching the Manor House, where it produced the sincerest regret, for its consequences were better understood there than in Guy Leicester's case. The Squire

himself, thanks to falling rents and tenantless farms, was not unacquainted with financial deficits. "This is bad news indeed about Barton's pupils," he observed to his wife as they sat together after dinner, for she was not a woman to lose the society of a husband because he had a pipe in his mouth. "It is a case of the rats leaving the sinking ship, I fear. What on earth will the poor man do with a delicate wife to keep, and those charming daughters?"

"Things may turn out better than one expects," returned Mrs. Jermyn, quietly.

Her husband looked quickly up at her. Such a vague and meagre observation was, he felt, entirely out of character with his practical spouse. "You know something to their advantage, I'm sure you do, or you wouldn't look like that."

"I know nothing," replied the lady, angry with herself for having let even the tail of the cat out of the bag; "but I don't see so much to cry about since, though two pupils are leaving the Rectory, two new ones are coming to it."

"I wish they had come," said the Squire, dubiously. He had no reason to doubt their advent, but he thought a bird in the hand—and much more two birds—worth two in the bush.

Mrs. Jermyn would have given her ears, or at all events her cap, to have been at liberty to say, "Mr. Giles will marry Clare Barton and re-establish the family," but she was not sure about *her* bird in the bush; and, besides, she had promised to keep the rector's secret.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HANDSOME OFFER.

THAT Mr. Leicester and Mr. Avis were both to leave Mr. Barton's roof, "and for no fault of their own," as had certainly not been the case with Mr. Rivers, was news that was not long in reaching Market Overt. Curiously enough there was also some rumour, born no one knew how, that it was possible there would be no more pupils to fill their places. It reached Mr. Giles, in his fine rectory, so much too large for a bachelor, and affected him nearly. He was not a large-hearted man, but neither was he a mean one, and he tried to feel nothing but sorrow when he heard it. He liked Mr. Barton and the family, and felt that it would make a great difference to that gentleman—though he little guessed how much—in the way of income. This distressed him, but, nevertheless, he could not help feeling that it would improve his own prospects with Clare. He had always been an excellent *parti* for any young person of her condition; but he was somehow aware that a large income and "a position in the county" had not the weight with her that they had with other girls. She seemed quite content with her lot in life, and not so conscious of the superiority of his own, as was to be expected. But if her father lost his pupils, the disproportion of fortune would be very marked indeed, and his own attentions—though, to do him justice, they would never be condescending—would have a better chance of being appreciated. If he had been told that her necessity would be his opportunity, he would have

repudiated the idea with indignation; but that was what he felt, and what a good many other people would have felt under similar circumstances.

Indeed, it was from one point of view, to his credit, since it showed modesty. Mr. Giles was perfectly aware that on his merits alone, and independent of any material attractions, he could never have won Clare Barton for his wife. He was not even displeased that he had been so long making up his mind to try his fortune. He felt more confident, and of better hope, and though he could not quite screw up his courage to put the question to the young lady herself, he resolved to do so through her father. He had issued an invitation for a clerical dinner party at which Mr. Barton was to be a guest, and he hoped to find an opportunity on that occasion, and if not, to make it.

Mr. Barton would have given a great deal—if he had had it to give—to get off that invitation. It had been accepted long ago, before Rivers's disgraceful conduct and its consequences had become common talk, and he felt that to decline it now would be an act of cowardice. He had never looked forward to the entertainment with any pleasure, for his host and himself, though perfectly good friends, were antipathetic; nor would his fellow guests, the county clergy, whose ways and modes, except as regards parochial matters, had little in common with his own, be much more to his taste. But to go to a heavy dinner party with a heavy heart is an infliction indeed. To make pretence of pleasure when we feel none, and much more when we are miserable, is one of the severest of social punishments. He had always played a leading part in such meetings; his experiences among the aristocracy—the having lived near the rose, though he was not (like Mr. Giles) the rose itself—had

given him a certain pre-eminence, and he knew that apathy or silence on his part would be remarked upon, and assigned to its real cause. This was an additional trial to him, the having to dance in fetters, but it had to be borne. On the very morning of that festal day he received two polite letters from the parents of his expected pupils, to say that circumstances had occurred beyond their own control which compelled them with great regret to alter their intention of placing their sons beneath Mr. Barton's care; an overwhelming though not an unexpected blow, and that, too, had to be borne.

To see Mr. Barton's pleasant smile, to hear his genial talk upon matters a little higher perhaps than the ordinary Bleakshire level, no one would have imagined that this was to be his last appearance at any such entertainment; that for the future he would be out of the pale of society; that while the jest played on his lips, the throbs of his very heart seemed to whisper, "Ruin, ruin, ruin."

Mr. Giles, always most gracious to him, was overflowing in his attentions, and asked and deferred to his opinion upon all points, from the cooking of the dinner to the government of the church. His life-long relations with the powers that be gave him authority, it was supposed, to speak on both these subjects, and his hearers little guessed how infinitesimally small was the interest he just now took in either of them. When the question a man has to put to himself is, "How am I to provide for a wife and children, accustomed to every comfort, upon £50 a year?" all other questions sink into insignificance. Even his thoughts of the eternal future became, if not less important, at least less important.

There were poor men at that dinner to whom it may well have seemed a banquet fit for the gods (for, to say truth, their host was a little ostentatious in his entertainments), but they all had homes from which they had received no notice to quit, and at all events a sufficiency for their families. But this was not Mr. Barton's case. He was conscious that, though he had certainly no intentions of begging, he was practically a beggar.

John Barton was by nature devoid of envy; he had often been an eye-witness of the superfluous splendour of the lives of those who have great possessions without its arousing one spark of jealousy; but now he felt,—and felt it with shame,—a certain bitterness of spirit at the spectacle of luxury around him. The idea of his ever living in such a house as the rectory of Market Overt never crossed his mind, but that anyone, to whom one-quarter of its accommodation would (as Mr. Giles himself assured him was the case) be amply sufficient, should be living there, whereas in a few short months he himself might not know where to lay his head, awoke a cruel comparison. His host had seemed bent on calling his attention to his luxurious surroundings with a certain depreciation of them, which the other took, though wrongly, for the pride which apes humility. "After all, my dear Barton, these things do not constitute happiness. You are blessed with a loving wife and delightful daughters; but I am a solitary man. It is true I can draw my friends around me on occasions like the present, but it is not the atmosphere of home."

Mr. Giles had never before expressed himself in this sort of fashion, and Mr. Barton (who attributed it to an extra allowance of champagne) only gave him a

faint smile in reply. It would have been easy to answer, "Why, being in so excellent a position, do you not throw your handkerchief to some desirable young woman?" but he had not the heart to indulge in such common-places. He would have taken his leave after his cup of coffee and cigar, but Mr. Giles, when he had risen to go, had entreated him so earnestly to delay his departure that he could not but give way. As it had been put to him with truth, he had so much less far to go,—only a mile-and-a-half or so,—than the other guests, and in the end he outstayed them all. Then, as he rose at last with a sigh that might well have been taken as a compliment to his host, but was in fact caused by the reflection of the sad, sweet face that was waiting for him at home, Mr. Giles laid his hand upon his arm, with "Just one moment, Barton." Then he stopped for a minute, alarmed at his own audacity. His face was red; his little eyes quivered with nervousness; the dew stood upon his forehead.

"What is it?" inquired Mr. Barton, smiling in spite of himself, for again he thought it was the champagne.

"It is something which I have long wished to speak to you about," went on Mr. Giles with rapidity, and then, like a man who runs at a jump and funks as he nears the fence, he stopped once more.

"If I can be of any service to you in anything, pray command me," said Mr. Barton, in answer to his appealing look.

"Oh, yes, you can; you can *do* it for me if you please, Barton, and I only wish you would. I have not the pluck, and that's the fact. I want you to tell Miss Clare that I adore her. If she would only consent to be my wife there is no wish of hers in the world that would remain ungratified."

Mr. Barton was at first too astonished to frame a reply, and when he did so it was not to the credit of his intelligence. He made the mistake of taking a lower view of his companion's character than it deserved.

"Are you aware, Mr. Giles," he answered, gravely, "that, though always far from prosperous, I have recently become a very poor man, and that whoever marries a daughter of mine will do so absolutely without dower?"

"I do not want your dower; I want your daughter," exclaimed Mr. Giles, with a sort of vehement desperation. "I have got plenty for both of us. The idea of connecting her, in the most distant fashion, with pecuniary matters, is most painful to me. Of course, I will see to them. If you think my life is uncertain, as indeed it is, I will insure it for any amount you please and settle it upon her."

"Indeed, Mr. Giles, you are going much too far into the question," said Mr. Barton. "Your proposal takes me utterly by surprise. Do not suppose that I do not appreciate it. I am sure you mean nothing but what is generous, and what my daughter should be grateful for."

"The obligation would be upon my side," said Mr. Giles. It was an inconsequential, and to say truth, as it struck his hearer, rather an idiotic remark. Though there could be no doubt about the rector's earnestness, there was indeed something strange both in his mode of expressing himself and his behaviour. What had he meant, for example, in saying that his life was "uncertain," or had he meant anything? The idea that his host was rather deficient in intelligence was not a new one to Mr. Barton, but it had never struck him so

forcibly before. He had always thought his appearance somewhat "against him," but never so much so as now. The reason of this was that he had for the first time to consider him in the possible light of a husband for his daughter. Mr. Barton thought very highly of his daughters. Mr. Giles's proposition was in fact very displeasing to him, but it was not so unwelcome as it would have been a few weeks ago. He felt at all events compelled to consider it. His own health was not what it had been; the springs of life within him had, he felt, been weakened by the load of misfortune that had so suddenly overwhelmed him. Here was a comfortable home for Clare for life; a home perhaps,—for Mr. Giles was a generous man,—for her sister also. It was an offer that most men in Mr. Barton's position, and many in a much better one, would have hailed with the utmost satisfaction. He had no right in any case to deprive Clare of such an opportunity of providing for herself if she had a mind to take it. But he could never ask her to take it.

"You will think about it, at all events," said Mr. Giles, plaintively.

"It is for Clare to think about it when you have made your offer," said Mr. Barton.

"That will be necessary, you think? I mean that I should speak to her myself?" returned the rector. "Surely, is not a father the proper person? You could say things about me, you know, that I could scarcely say of myself." This was very true in more than one sense; but what this candidate wanted, as Mr. Barton only too well understood, was his vote and interest, and that, at present at all events, with Mr. Giles before his eyes, he could not promise to give him.

"Here is *my* hand, Mr. Giles," he said, cutting short

an interview which was growing insupportable to him, "but my daughter's hand it is not in my power to give you. It is a matter entirely for her own consideration, but I give you my word that she will not be prejudiced against you by me. Indeed, so far as I am concerned, your intentions will be divulged to nobody—except my wife."

Mr. Giles's face, which had worn a very depressed expression, here grew far more cheerful.

"I am sure dear Mrs. Barton will be my friend," he said.

"I am sure she will not be your enemy," returned the other. Perhaps in his heart he felt that she would be Mr. Giles's friend, and was not sorry to have shifted the responsibility on to her shoulders. Such is the animal Man, even the best specimens of it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AVIS DEPARTS.

MR. BARTON had had much to think of as he drove to Market Overt in his pony carriage to join Mr. Giles's dinner party, but he had far more food for thought on his return journey. On the former occasion there had seemed no way out of the difficulties that surrounded him and his, but now a door had been opened, through which one at all events of his dear ones might, if she would, make her escape. Without being at all of opinion that a paradise was awaiting her in the rector's offer, she might yet, in view of her melancholy prospects in all other directions, think it well to accept it;

but as to pointing out the advantages to herself, and far less to her belongings, that Mr. Barton felt it was impossible for him to do. Her mother might take a different view, in which case he had little doubt of what it would be, and consequently of Clare's decision; but for his part he would be silent, and let Mr. Giles plead for himself.

He found, as he expected, late as it was for country house life, his wife sitting up for him in the study.

"How dissipated you are, my dear," she said with her cheerful smile; under ordinary circumstances she would have added, "so I conclude you enjoyed yourself after all." But she knew only too well that he had not enjoyed himself.

"It was not the festivities that delayed me, my darling, but some private talk with Mr. Giles. He has asked permission to propose to Clare."

Mrs. Barton, who had been standing with her hand upon her husband's shoulder, sank down on the chair beside her as though prostrated by the proverbial feather.

"Is it really so, John? Are you sure you understood him aright?" she inquired after a moment's pause.

"I am quite sure, I am bound to say, though he expressed himself a little vulgarly."

"Yes, yes," she interrupted hastily, as though that might have been taken for granted, and on other accounts had better not have been mentioned.

"He really showed great generosity; a total carelessness about the difference of fortune between them, and I think a genuine affection. It is at all events, as I told him, a great compliment to Clare."

"It is indeed, and would be so to any girl," replied Mrs. Barton. "Of course, it would be enormously ad-

vantageous to her, and to Rose also, especially under present circumstances. But what did you say?"

"I said that I would put no obstruction in his way, but declined to be his advocate in the matter; that it was one she must decide for herself."

"That was quite right, John. We must resist all temptation to—to—put the least pressure upon the dear girl's inclination. Her future happiness is the first thing—nay, the only thing—for us to consider. Does Mr. Giles know how we are situated—I mean exactly?"

"That is not likely; a man so rich never contemplates the depths of poverty; he knows, however, that the loss of my pupils means the loss of most of my income, that I am at all events, by comparison with him, a very poor man; but that consideration, as I have said, does not affect him at all. He was generous; he talked even of insuring his life, in order to make provision for Clare, in case anything should happen to him."

"And what do you think about it, John?"

"That is a question, my darling, you must not ask me. I promised Mr. Giles to be quite neutral; and I had rather not think about it at all."

This confession could hardly be said to be within the limits of neutrality; but it did not surprise Mrs. Barton. She well knew that, if her husband had been a free agent, he would not have selected the rector of Market Overt for his son-in-law. It was, alas! a case of "beggars must not be choosers."

"When do you think he will make his offer, John, if he does make it?"

"I should conclude, almost immediately. He will hardly come before Tuesday, however, as I happened to say that Leicester was leaving us on that day, and Avis to-morrow. He will naturally prefer to come

when there is no one here, and we have settled down."

It was a phrase that would only too accurately describe their position, when the pupils had left them:—the rats from the sinking ship, as Mr. Jermyn had said.

"Don't you think," said Mr. Barton, tentatively, "that it would be better to say something about it to Clare, beforehand?"

"If you think so, yes, dear," she answered, gently; "on Tuesday, when we are left to ourselves, I will do so."

It was a dreadful thing to look forward to, but Mrs. Barton did not shrink from the undertaking of it for a moment. It was her duty, since her husband thought it right, as a wife; only as a mother, she knew it would wring her heart, and therefore she proposed Tuesday as a respite. The time, provided Mr. Giles did not pay his visit earlier, which, from what she knew of him—his shyness and fear of company—she felt pretty sure of, seemed of small importance, yet it is probable that her daughter's whole future did, in fact, depend upon that slight circumstance; upon such little hinges revolve the great gates of life!

Though nothing more was said about the matter just then, it was seldom out of Mrs. Barton's thoughts, and there was only one thing that comforted her when she reflected upon it. If the sacrifice was to be made, there would at least be no previous dream of wedded bliss to be shattered; both her daughters, as she had every reason to believe, were fancy free. It was strange that a woman so wrapped up in her children and so observant of them, as Mrs. Barton was, could have fallen into such an error. But outside her own roof she knew that they could have found no lover, and

beneath it such a contingency seemed absolutely out of the question. It had been always tacitly understood that the pupils—so far as any matrimonial design was concerned—were “taboo.” It was a point of honour with Mr. Barton that it should be so, and both the girls, though it had never been put before them in plain words, were aware of it. With Mrs. Barton love and duty had always gone hand in hand, and she had never contemplated their separation in her daughter’s case. But with respect to Clare and Mr. Giles this could hardly be said of her, and it was that very fact which made the task she had just promised to undertake so grievous to her.

On Friday morning Mr. Avis came into the study to take leave of his tutor. He had never before understood the great regard he entertained for “old Bart,” nor how disagreeable going away from Leadon would be to him. The change that had of late come over Mr. Barton seemed to have culminated and reached its worst that morning. His manner was calm, his voice was firm, but to Avis, who for his age was a keen observer, the tutor looked heartbroken. This the young gentleman was quite aware was not caused by the thought of parting with him; but old Bart looked sorry for that too, and in truth he was so. Avis had not been one of his favourite pupils; they had little or nothing in common with one another, and his ways and manners had often grated upon him, but he had been under his roof some time and Mr. Barton was so constituted that that was a claim upon him; moreover, of late days he had shown a very genuine sympathy with what had befallen his host and his family.

“Well, Avis, we are sorry to lose you,” said the tutor, frankly.

Avis was inclined to be cynical—comically cynical, which is almost as bad as the undiluted article—yet he was well convinced that Mr. Barton was not thinking of the pecuniary loss entailed by his departure; that he was saying something kind which was also genuine.

Avis was naturally practical, and his upbringing had increased his tendency to regard matters from a material point of view; he made a picture in his mind of this once happy household he was about to leave, reduced to undeserved poverty; and even foreshadowed a darker future—poor old Bart, “laid by,” wanting necessaries, in ill-health, and with his death-bed haunted by the knowledge that he left his family almost destitute. The tears came into the young fellow’s eyes, but he kept them down by trying to think of something else. “Curse that fellow Ripton,” he murmured to himself.

“I didn’t catch what you said,” remarked the tutor.

“I was only thinking that you have been very badly treated, sir.”

It was not a respectful speech, considering their relative positions, but Mr. Avis, whose character was far from reverential, meant no harm; moreover, he was in the act of taking leave, when the bonds of discipline are naturally loosened. Mr. Barton, at all events, only smiled.

“You are not to blame, at all events, my good fellow.”

“No, sir, but I think my uncle is; and if I can only persuade him of that, and get him to——”

Here the tutor’s face assumed such a look of marked displeasure, that the sentence remained unfinished, which was perhaps fortunate, for what Mr. Avis had

intended to say was, "if I could but get my uncle to put his knife into 'old Ripton,' I will."

It was only a metaphorical expression for doing his lordship an injury in the course of business, which Mr. Puddock had opportunities of doing; but it would have probably not been favourably received.

"I really don't know what you mean, Avis," said Mr. Barton, severely, "nor what your uncle could do for me. Do you suppose I want him to lend me money?"

"I hope not, indeed, sir," said Avis, in a tone which put any expectation of that kind so entirely out of the question, that Mr. Barton could not restrain his mirth, and it was with a smile on his lip he had little expected to find there, that he bade his queer pupil good-bye.

Mr. Avis's adieux to the ladies, though brief, and, to say truth, a little awkward, were accepted in the most friendly spirit.

"If I were not the soul of honour," he afterwards observed to Leicester, "I should have been half tempted, when wishing her good-bye, to cut you out with your young woman; she is a Rose without a thorn. If you have got the pluck of a lamb, you'll stick to her."

When he found himself in the fly, taking his last look at Leadon, his sentimental vein asserted itself. "The place will know me no more," he murmured to himself. "I shall be forgotten as though I were an ordinary pupil—"

And from the garden and the wild
Will fresh associations blow,
And year by year the landscape grow
Familiar to the stranger's child.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST DINNER PARTY.

GUY LEICESTER, always much liked by the Jermyns, had become first favourite of Mr. Barton's pupils *vice* Rivers disgraced; and a farewell dinner was given to him at the Manor House. Under the circumstances, as Mrs. Jermyn told Mrs. Barton, there would be no party to meet him, which it was great relief to that lady to hear. She had not the gift, possessed by her husband, of making herself agreeable to "outside people" when her heart was heavy.

"I suppose, however," added Mrs. Jermyn, "that you will have no objection to our asking Mr. Giles?"

"I think we had rather be quite alone," said Mrs. Barton, hastily. "None of us, as you may imagine, are in very good spirits."

"But Mr. Giles is so old a friend."

This was not quite true, and Mrs. Barton was surprised at her kind neighbour, who so thoroughly understood her, putting the matter in that light. She felt her colour rising, from the knowledge she possessed of the rector's intentions, and replied nervously, "It is true we have known him a long time, but not as we have known you and your husband, dear Mrs. Jermyn."

That lady looked at her rather gravely, and with a quiet significance observed, "Do you think you are wise, my dear, in making this objection?"

Mrs. Barton answered nothing, but turned a still deeper scarlet.

"You see," continued the other lady, "he is always

so glad to meet your young people, and will, I *know*, be dreadfully disappointed if he is debarred from the opportunity. I confess, notwithstanding some little drawbacks, I like Mr. Giles, and—" here she read what she had been looking for in her companion's face—" though I have promised not to betray his confidence, I am sure you know what I mean, and what he means."

"I have a suspicion of it," said poor Mrs. Barton, her eyes filling with tears.

"My dear, it is surely nothing to cry about," continued Mrs. Jermyrn, tenderly. "You can't expect to keep your daughters for ever. And think what it will mean for Clare."

"I am thinking of it, dear Mrs. Jermyrn, and it adds largely to my load of trouble."

"I should have hoped, my dear, it would have lightened it. There is not a mother in the county who would not be pleased; such a noble living, such a beautiful house, and such prospects for Rose also. Surely you would never hesitate——"

"It is not for me to decide," interrupted Mrs. Barton, with a sort of desperation; "it is for Clare herself."

"And you have doubts of her decision! why the girl must be mad to hesitate about accepting such an offer. I am very sentimental myself, of course I would rather have seen Clare married to some fine young fellow of her own kind as it were; to Mr. Rivers, for instance, if he had had a little more money, and of course"—for Mrs. Barton looked displeased—"if he had not behaved so ill. But we cannot have everything. What can be the dear girl's objection? Mr. Giles is not well born on one side, but that is made up for as it were on the other. The best families in the kingdom—after a generation or two—are proud of such a genealogy."

"It is not that at all," said Mrs. Barton. "Clare is not at all a girl of that sort."

"No, indeed, I am sure she is not," replied the other, confidently. "Neither of your daughters are fools. Still, there must be some obstacle."

"I never said so," pleaded Mrs. Barton, "and I don't know that there is."

"But you suspect there is; it is easy to see that. Is it possible that Clare may have been disappointed; and, having been so, is unwilling to think of love at all?"

"Disappointed? I do not understand you." It was now Mrs. Jermyn's turn to feel embarrassed. What had been in her mind was that old notion of hers regarding Rivers and Clare, to which no allusion, after what had happened, could be made.

"I thought perhaps there might have been some previous attachment," she murmured.

"There has been no one for her to be attached to," said Mrs. Barton, simply; "she has hardly seen anybody but the pupils."

From her tone, you might have thought she was speaking of her daughter's brothers.

"Then there can be no real obstacle after all," said Mrs. Jermyn, with an air of relief.

"No obstacle, no. But Clare has—I don't say peculiar views, because I share them, but—views that are not much entertained by young women nowadays. She may hesitate, notwithstanding the temptation of such an alliance as we are considering, to give her hand where her heart is not."

"Love often comes after marriage," observed Mrs. Jermyn, sententiously. "I am sure I never loved my husband so much as I do to-day."

"That is my case, too," said Mrs. Barton, with a tender

sigh. "But then we always loved our husbands, even when they were our lovers."

"I am glad they don't hear us, my dear," said Mrs. Jermyn, "it would make them very conceited."

This she felt was very like giving up the contest and owning herself defeated, which the lady of the Manor was always very loth to be.

"Then, if I don't ask Mr. Giles to dinner on this occasion, you must promise to meet him the very next time he comes."

"If all goes well, as you would call it," she put in hastily, "of course I promise. If Clare refuses him, you would hardly ask her to meet him."

"Yes, I would," returned the other, "I would keep on asking her till she promised to dine with him every day of her life."

"A more indomitable match-maker I never knew," said Mrs. Barton, smiling in spite of herself. "Still, whatever happens, I shall know that you will wish it to be for the best for Clare."

"Well, of course, I don't care—that is not so much—about Mr. Giles as about your dear girl. It is not as if they were one already."

"No, it is not," sighed Mrs. Barton, as if that contingency was very far from certain; and so for the time the matter dropped.

So the farewell dinner came off; and in conformity with Mrs. Barton's wishes, the party consisted only of the five guests from the Rectory, and their host and hostess. Everyone did their best to be cheerful, and the only complete and total failure in that respect was the guest of the evening, Mr. Guy Leicester.

Ever since Avis had set before him the facts of the case as regarded what Mr. Barton's position would be

if deprived of pupils, Leicester had looked upon the whole family with an unspeakable distress and pity. He beheld what had been to him a hitherto fabulous monster, the Griffin Poverty, in the act of devouring them. His unfortunate tutor, in his eyes, looked even more ill and haggard than he really was ; Mrs. Barton was becoming more fragile and delicate every day, and the girls still blooming only because presumably unconscious of the ruin that threatened them. It was this spectacle that robbed Guy Leicester's pleasant face of its smile, and overspread it with the sickly hue of thought. But his melancholy was naturally set down to a more personal source, his regret at leaving his old friends at Leadon.

As the three men sat together after dinner, the host referred to it. "You can't be more sorry to leave us, Leicester, than we are to lose you ; still let us hope it will not be forever. You'll come down and look us up some fine day or another, I hope."

It was rather an unfortunate speech so far as the persons Leicester would chiefly wish to see again were concerned, since it was certain that Mr. Barton would have to quit the Rectory as soon as he could get it off his hands. That gentleman indeed had already spoken to him on that matter, and asked his advice about writing to Mr. Audrey, from whom he held the house as a yearly tenant, as to the possibility of an earlier release.

The good-natured Squire felt as though he could have bitten his tongue out as soon as he had uttered the words. Leicester, to whom it would have been misery to revisit the village with Clare and her belongings away from it, and who knew they would have to go, kept a painful silence. Mr. Barton, who thoroughly

understood the cause of the embarrassment of his companions, thought it best to laugh it off. "Well, the only chance of Leicester seeing us at Leadon, Jermyn, is for me to take your new purchase, the Well Cottage, off your hands. It will be rather a tight fit for us, but very convenient."

"I hope you will all come first to the Hall," said the Squire, effusively, "where you will find plenty of room and a hearty welcome, and there you shall stay till we get tired of you."

He meant it, every bit of it. But, wishing perhaps to make amends for his former speech, he had overshot the mark; it was plain that four people could hardly come to live indefinitely at a friend's house, however friendly. Mr. Barton held out his hand, which, under the circumstances, was the best acknowledgment of the other's kindness he could have made, and the Squire took it and pressed it warmly. These two men had a great regard for one another, and both knew that it was almost their final farewell.

It seemed difficult to Leicester, accustomed only to the smooth paths and shaven lawns of life, to imagine a more distressing scene. A picture of the family at the Well Cottage, a place necessarily disagreeable to them from its associations, projected itself upon his mind like a nightmare imaged by a magic-lantern. True, it was the best cottage in the village, but that was not saying much. What had been a snug house enough for the old carrier would be a dwelling full of discomforts, as well as utterly inadequate, for the Bartons. The pitying Leicester forecast their change of residence in colours of eclipse that were suitable enough, though with a ludicrous want of practical knowledge, since for even the one servant he had calculated they

might afford to keep there would be no room at the cottage. He had more than once seen Hannah Bryce drawing water from the well, and thought it a most graceful occupation, but for Clare to do so was quite a different matter. Leicester's social views, so far as he had any, were vaguely democratic; but his sense of comparison at the notion of the Barton family inhabiting the carrier's cottage was no less shocked upon that account. That such a thing should ever be seriously contemplated seemed to militate against an overruling Providence, and the more so since it was entirely through the tutor's having so nobly done his duty with respect to the girl who had lived there, that he would be reduced to such a necessity.

Guy Leicester had hitherto not much troubled himself about the mysteries of life or the wrongs of humanity. He knew indeed that there were irregularities of fortune, but the gulf between rich and poor had hitherto never been visible to him; now he caught a glimpse of its depth and width and darkness. What was more, he saw what patient merit suffers at the hands of the unworthy—how the whip of the world falls upon innocent and fragile shoulders. In the abstract, it is difficult for a young gentleman nursed in the lap of luxury and heir to thousands a year to picture these things, and what he had vaguely heard of them had been dulled by the cuckoo note of exaggeration. But now they were brought home to him. He yearned to set things right, and, unlike many social reformers, to begin with those which lay ready to his hand. The misfortune that had befallen his friends opened his eyes to the common lot; but for the present they were mainly fixed upon the particular catastrophe.

The central figure in the picture of misery he thus contemplated was Clare; but the question, How should he help her? which would have occurred to most men of his age as an isolated matter capable of easy solution, he did not even put to himself. His sympathy was less selfish, and inquired impatiently, "How shall I help them all?" With some people it would have been easy; with them, he felt it would be very difficult, unless he had the right to help.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE LAUREL WALK.

IN the drawing-room matters were not much better, though Mrs. Jermyn strove to make them so. She was a sensible woman and a motherly soul, as those who are denied children of their own not seldom are, and did not attempt to make dismal things pleasant by ignoring them. The most painful conversation to those who are sore at heart, as she well understood, is tittle-tattle. Without alluding to the deeper misfortunes of her guests, she touched the fringe of them.

"My husband and I," she said, "will be almost as sorry to lose Mr. Leicester as you will be. We think him such a nice fellow."

"He is indeed," assented Mrs. Barton. "He is always thinking of others. Not one young man out of fifty in his position would have offered to teach in the Sunday School. I believe he did it solely because we were short-handed, for Rose is too shy to teach, and there was only Clare to take a class."

There was a fire in the grate, though it was early autumn, and Clare seemed to find its brightness too much for her, for she took up a fan to shield her face.

"I think there must have been some reason of the kind," said Mrs. Jermyn, "for, though he is so nice and well conducted, Mr. Leicester does not give one the idea of a Sunday-School young man. He is good, but not goody goody."

"Yes, on Friday—the day after to-morrow—my husband's last pupil," sighed Mrs. Barton, "and, on the

whole, the one we have liked the best, will leave us." It was characteristic of her that, though they were losing all, she could find regret in her heart for this lesser evil.

"He has always been so kind," said Rose; "and, though he is a little shy, he is not awkwardly so, like Mr. Giles."

The two elder ladies exchanged uncomfortable looks. "For my part, I pity shyness in anybody," observed Clare. "It is, after all, to Mr. Giles's credit, considering his material advantages, that he is shy."

"I quite agree with you," exclaimed Mrs. Jermyn, earnestly. "One would never think, to hear him talk, that he had the best rectory house and the finest living in the county."

"And I am sure, to hear Mr. Leicester talk," said Rose, a little indignantly, "you would never think he was heir to twelve thousand a year."

Here the subject of their remarks came in with the other gentlemen, and the topic of course was dropped. Mrs. Jermyn drew good omens from what Clare had said about Mr. Giles, and whispered as much to Mrs. Barton as that lady was putting on her cloak upstairs; but the other replied that what Clare had said had only been caused, she thought, by her sense of right and disinclination to hear anyone disparaged. "Then why did she not defend Mr. Leicester, as Rose has done?" argued Mrs. Jermyn; a question the answer to which occurred to neither ladies.

"I have done with gaieties now," thought poor Mrs. Barton when she got home that night. The effort to appear "herself," even in the presence of her old friends at the Hall, had tried her self-command to the utmost, and she was rejoiced indeed that Mr. Giles had not been

her fellow-guest. For the rest of her life there would be no more "dining out" or festivities probably of any kind, which on her own account she did not regret, but she took farewell of them for her daughters' sake with a sigh. Henceforward not only she, but they, would have to turn their hands to "cutting and contriving," as she had been wont to term those little economies which were now to be the necessity of their lives.

If the powers of darkness seemed leagued against her as she lay in her sleepless bed that night, they seemed still more so against Clare. Even in the morning a nightmare sense of oppression weighed upon her; she felt half suffocated in the house, and soon after breakfast stole away into the garden, and up and down the laurel walk paced with restless foot. The place was not so secluded but that she was at times visible from the house, and Mrs. Barton presently observed to Rose, "Is it not imprudent of your sister to go out without her cloak?"

"Let me take it to her," said Leicester, gently, though to repress a show of eagerness taxed all his powers; and with trembling hands he took it. It was an opportunity of seeing her alone for which he had been looking for days; but he had found none, and he knew the reason only too well. Clare had evaded him. These two young people were quite aware of their love for one another, and, scarcely less so, of its hopelessness. It always had been hopeless, but never so much so (if the Hibernicism may be permitted) as it was now. They were neither of them of that sort who marry in despite of their parents and without consideration of fitness and propriety. Guy's father, as he was well aware, had other views for him; Clare's father was bound by every tie of honour to oppose himself to such

an unequal match : at present, notwithstanding that he had been imprudent and sentimental, and was suffering most grievously for it, he had nothing to reproach himself with from a social point of view, but to allow a daughter of his own to marry a pupil in Guy Leicester's position would have been a stain upon his scutcheon indeed, and one which Clare fully recognised. A good deal of "time and space," not to mention at least one individual, would have to be annihilated to make these two lovers happy, but they were lovers for all that. How they had found this out is not easily described, but by young people of the same age the discovery will not be considered incredible. The consciousness of the fact, and the necessity for concealing it, was the cause of the unrest and misery from which the girl was now suffering. That Guy should be leaving Leadon was, she admitted to herself, "the best thing that could happen to them," but in her heart of hearts it seemed the worst thing. After the next twenty-four hours she would never see his face again, but she felt that she could never forget him, and it behooved her, for his sake, to give him no encouragement to entertain the same profitless recollection.

And yet how she longed to tell him how she loved him. It was not love and duty that were at war within her, for duty had already gained the victory, but the head and the heart, her reason and her feelings. She wished him to depart without a word, and yet she yearned for the word ; there are liquids which we know will in the end increase our thirst, but in the day of drought who can resist their temptation ?

"I have brought you your cloak, Miss Clare," said Guy ; he had never much command of language, and this morning he could scarcely trust himself to speak

at all. His heart was in his mouth, as the phrase goes, and it seemed as though he dared not open his lips lest that circumstance should be revealed.

"Thanks, Mr. Leicester, that is like your kindness," she answered, gently, "though I did not feel cold."

"My kindness," he returned, with bitterness; "yes, it is very like my kindness; for it was your mother's thought that suggested my bringing it, and it is your own cloak."

"Still, if I had needed it, you would have brought me yours, like Sir Walter Raleigh," said Clare, cheerfully, "and from much more unselfish motives."

"To be sure, Sir Walter had expectations," replied the young fellow, slowly, "and I have none; nothing but hope."

She answered nothing, but walked on a little more quickly, arranging the cloak, as she did so, with unnecessary pains.

"Would you deny me even hope?" he murmured, plaintively. "Even the most wretched have hope."

"It is going to rain; I think we had better go in," exclaimed the girl, with feeble desperation.

"Clare?"

There was no feebleness in that word; indeed it was spoken with such emphasis, that the echo which dwelt in the garden wall repeated it.

"Yes," he continued, in answer to her look of pained surprise, "I must call you Clare for once, if it be for the last time. It is as Clare I shall always think of you. Is there any harm in that?"

"There is no harm in it, and there is no good," was the quiet reply, "and you know it, Guy."

"At all events it is good of you to say 'Guy,'" he answered, softly. "I shall like my name henceforth,

next after your name. My darling, how I love you!" He spoke with a loving devotion, the force of which was doubled by its unexpectedness; it was almost as though yonder far off "barrow" on the Downs had become an active volcano; the passion, silent and suppressed for months, had found its voice at last.

"Forbear, forbear, I entreat you, Guy," exclaimed the girl in trembling tones, "you are giving me pain."

Her face, pale from the first as marble, had suddenly become pale and pinched.

"Why should it give you pain to hear the truth, and what you know is the truth, Clare?"

"Why should you tell it me if I know it?" she answered quickly. "What is the use of it? What is the use of anything that either of us can say? It is cruel of you, Guy; it is unmanly."

"It may be cruel, my darling, but it is not unmanly," answered the other, with unconscious wisdom. "I should be more or less than man to have left this house keeping silence upon the subject next my heart."

"It would have been better for both of us had you done so," she answered, firmly. "It would at all events have saved us this bitter hour."

"An hour! What is an hour?" he replied. "Do you suppose I shall forget you in an hour, or in a year, or as long as my heart shall beat?"

"I hope so; most sincerely do I hope so."

"You hope so? Oh, Clare!" he explained, rebukefully.

"I do. Do you suppose that I wish you to be miserable for life, and on my account? It is useless, Guy, to fight against the inevitable. Our fate is fixed for us in this world, as regards one thing at least, that we shall live apart from one another to our lives' end. It

has always been so fixed, and what has happened of late has made no difference; but it has certainly not made what was impossible less impossible. You have a father who would never consent to——what I entreat you not to speak of more directly. I have a father who is bound by every law of honour and of duty to oppose it. You would not ask his daughter, I hope and believe, to disregard those laws."

If Avis had been in Leicester's place he would have argued that they held their fate in their own hands; that "governor or no governor" he had enough for both of them to live on for the present, and that, sooner or later, by mere lapse of time all would come right. But Leicester was not one of that masterly sort, even independently of his scruples. What seemed to Clare to be the right thing to do, seemed in a less degree to be so to him, but chiefly because it seemed right to her. She had won him by the nobility of her nature at least as much as by her grace and beauty. Still, it was not in human nature that he should find her thus voluntarily separating herself from him without an effort to recapture her.

"Clare," he cried, "let me speak to my father; he loves me dearly, and will not see me wretched, where the remedy is so easy. Ah, if he could only see you."

"No, Guy," she interrupted coldly, almost haughtily, "that must never be. The only effect of such an appeal would be to bring disappointment upon yourself, disagreement between you and your father, and humiliation upon me. If you tell him that I have listened to your suit, you will tell him what is not true."

"I am to understand, then, Clare, that you decline my love on any terms." It was a cruel speech, though

he did not mean it to be so. Once more into her pale, cold face there came that look of distress and pain it wrung his heart to see.

"I do decline, Guy, once and for all, the offer of your hand; I absolutely refuse to contemplate any engagement between you and me. We are henceforth both as free as though you had never spoken to me upon the matter."

"My darling," he answered, gently, "that is impossible, if, at least, I read your heart aright. What you mean is, not that we shall both be free, but that I shall be free. You are resolved to have no claim upon me; to leave to time and circumstance—the living in another sphere and the meeting with other girls as fair and good (as you imagine) as yourself—the work of forgetting, while you, unspoilt by all the world can do, will still remember. You wrong my nature, I hope, in supposing that such an act of self-sacrifice will not rather bind me to you with tenfold nearness. But, since you will have it so, I will say not another word, nor cause you, while I still remain under your roof, another moment's distress of mind."

He took her hand and raised it, not ungracefully, to his lips, and the next moment was gone. It was none too soon; the strain and stress upon the girl's feelings had been more than she could bear. She sank down upon a garden seat and burst into tears. She had conquered, but might have exclaimed with a conqueror of a different kind, "Another such a victory, and I should be undone."

CHAPTER XXXI.

GUY LEICESTER'S OFFER.

LEICESTER knew that all was over between him and Clare. Just as certainly as though she had said, "I do not love you." He had been rejected, not indeed by her, but by circumstances, the harshness of fate. But he loved and pitied her no less than before. It was horrible, it was shocking, to picture her in poverty, while he should be living in "luxurious ease;" and this vehement compassion extended to her family, though one of them, her father, was one of the chief barriers to his happiness. The hope of his life was denied him, but surely he would be permitted to save these excellent people, who had been so uniformly good and kind to him, from unmerciful disaster. There would be difficulties, he feared, even about that, but they surely would not prove insurmountable. The proposition he designed to make seemed to him reasonable from every point of view; in accordance with justice and common sense, and very easy to put in practice. But the working of it—the mode of expressing his intentions—was to one of his shy and retiring nature intensely embarrassing.

He had given a great many things away in his time, but in one sense had not been a "cheerful giver," for, though as liberal a young fellow as ever breathed, he had always felt awkward in his benefactions. The task he had now set himself to do seemed to demand a tact and delicacy altogether beyond his powers; but he meant to go through with it. No one wondered—Clare

we may be sure least of all—that he was absent and distraught that day, and at dinner time, the last dinner he would ever have at Leadon, that he ate little and spoke less. But his mind was not so full of the thoughts they credited him with but that it had room for another matter which, so far as the doing of it was concerned, was almost as unwelcome.

He wished them all good-night as usual, though indeed it was not as usual, but with laboured speech and heavy heart, and then, when he knew that all had retired to rest except his tutor, he knocked softly at the study door.

He was not bidden to come in immediately, but there was first a shuffling of papers, the nature of which he partly guessed; they were certain calculations which Mr. Barton had been making as to how long his little store of money would hold out even on starvation allowance, half rations and even less, and when the “come in” was given and his tutor’s face was turned to him in expectation, it seemed to have become years older. Even the appearance of the room, usually so snug and warm, seemed different, for, though the autumn night was cold and wet, there was no fire. The tutor had begun his economies, and, as is commonly the case with those unaccustomed to them, at the wrong end. His health was broken, and to catch a chill, as it seemed probable he had already done by the shiver that passed over him, was not the way to begin his battle with the world.

“What! not gone to bed yet, Leicester?” he said, kindly. “You have a long journey before you to-morrow, my good fellow, remember.”

“Yes, sir; but I wished to say a few words to you before I left.”

Here he stopped, and Mr. Barton said, "By all means," encouragingly.

"I have been told, sir, that the loss of your pupils will make a great difference to you—I mean," he stammered, "as to money."

"Your informant," returned Mr. Barton, drily, "was quite correct, though I fail to see what business it is of his."

"Oh, sir, pray do not be angry with me," pleaded Leicester; "I know I am very awkward and stupid, but the last thing in the world to enter into my mind was to be impertinent."

"There is not the least fear of your doing that, my dear Leicester," returned the other, "because you are essentially a gentleman. If I showed any irritation, it was directed elsewhere. Pray go on."

In spite of the invitation, Mr. Barton was unconsciously making it very hard for his pupil to go on.

"Well, sir, it seems to me most shameful and shocking"—the matter was just now in its abstract stage, and he felt he might be allowed to "spread himself"—"that persons who are of no particular use should have money they don't know what to do with, while other persons who—who are very nice people indeed, should have next to nothing."

Mr. Barton stared and smiled; these philosophical reflections in Mr. Leicester's mouth surprised and rather amused him.

"There are cases of that kind, no doubt," he said. "It is only to a few people that this world seems the best of all possible worlds; but such inequalities cannot be remedied."

"But when they can, sir, surely they ought to be?"

"I scarcely see the tendency of your argument," observed Mr. Barton, with just a touch of impatience. He wanted to get back to his calculations; his thoughts, too, just now were too pressing and serious to make interruption welcome.

"Well, sir, take your case and my case. You are not aware, perhaps, that I have some money of my own, so small a sum that my father takes no account of it, but gives me my allowance as though I had none. Yet I daresay some people would consider it quite a little fortune."

"A good many people would, no doubt," returned Mr. Barton, with a certain frigidity in his tone which alarmed his pupil exceedingly. "Well?"

"If I had six new-laid eggs," continued Leicester, desperately, "and did not eat eggs, and had in fact no use for them, you would allow me to give them to you, I suppose; now that is exactly the case with my six thousand pounds."

"Leicester, are you serious?" Mr. Barton was regarding his pupil half incredulously, but also with a certain tender satisfaction which gave the young fellow intense pleasure.

"I never was more serious, sir; nay, I never was half so serious. I do think—though I have things to trouble me," he put in pathetically—"that this is the happiest moment of my life."

"You mean because you think I shall take your money?"

"Well, of course, sir; I think I have shown there should be no difficulty about that."

Mr. Barton, with a grave look in his face, held out his hand, which Leicester took and pressed in both his own.

"I could not have imagined," said the tutor, earnestly,

"that to-night of all nights anything could have given me such pleasure, my good fellow, as you have conferred upon me."

"How glad I am!" said Leicester, simply. "That is what I wanted to do, to give pleasure to you and yours, and to be of use to you. I can realise the sum I spoke of in three days, and nothing more need be said about it."

"Nothing need be said, my dear lad, but a good deal will be thought about it; it is not a sort of offer a man in my position is ever likely to forget; but as for accepting it, that is not to be dreamt of."

"Not accept it! Oh dear, oh dear, you would surely not disappoint me like that!" The young fellow looked as if he were going to cry.

"It is not a question of disappointment, Leicester, though I think it quite possible that you are disappointed at not being able to give all you have to a friend. No doubt you think you are under some sort of obligation to me."

"I am indeed, sir," interrupted the other. "The happiest time of my life has been spent under your roof. Mrs. Barton and your daughters have been as mother and sisters to me. There has not been an hour in which I have not experienced some act of kindness at their hands."

"I dare say it seems so, my lad; it is a trait of a generous nature to exaggerate the smallest kindness. The proposition you make has so touched me that I cannot trust myself to speak of it as it deserves; there are many reasons which your impulsive and affectionate disposition has taken no account of, which make such a quixotic scheme impracticable; but, apart from them, just consider what would be said of *me*, with whom

already, as you know, fault has been found by those who have intrusted their sons to me, if I, being old enough to be his father, was to permit one of my own pupils to make over to me all his fortune?"

"It isn't all, sir," put in Leicester, simply; "I have seven thousand pounds odd; I have been totting it up this afternoon."

"But do you not see what a shameful thing it would appear to everybody?"

"Indeed I do not, sir; moreover, since nobody but you and I would ever know anything about it, they would have no opinion to offer, and you don't suppose I would ever breathe a word about it?"

"No, I do not, my dear lad. From first to last I can well believe your generous offer would be without a flaw. I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart; I say again that I shall never forget it, never; it has been balm to me in this bitter hour. But it is absolutely out of the question that I can accept it."

"Then you will not allow me to be of any use to you, sir, though it costs me nothing?"

"Do not say that, Leicester; you have been of great use to me. I was picturing the future in very doleful colours, when your kind face broke in upon me like sunshine. I thought my friends had deserted me, which you see clearly is not the case. You have talked about this matter as being between you and me, but I must be allowed to tell Mrs. Barton. She will estimate your offer at its true value, and it will cheer her heart as it has done mine."

"But not till I have gone, sir. Oh, pray don't say a word about it till I have gone," cried Leicester, apprehensively. It was not pleasant to him to be thanked for anything, but to be thanked for something which

had not been done would have been intolerable. And thus the matter ended.

In a court of honour, the conduct of Mr. Barton would of course have received approval ; but in one of common sense and common humanity, it must be admitted the approbation would not have been so certain. Nothing seems more reasonable and also in accordance with the Scriptures than that the superfluity of a man's wealth should supply the needs of his fellow ; nor does it appear that the principle is necessarily invalidated by the fact of that fellow being his friend.

Mr. Barton himself, however, never felt the slightest hesitation about declining his pupil's offer, nor did it even occur to him as a temptation to be resisted. But there came times when he was compelled to think about it, not only as he had foreseen, with tenderness and gratitude, but with a certain secret yearning and passionate doubt of the rectitude of his own instincts. Persons in a higher position in life, with things comfortable about them, will not understand this ; but to a man whose whole capital is a thousand pounds or so, on which he has to maintain a wife and daughters, the addition of another six thousand seems a circumstance which it would be wholly inadequate to describe as providential.

However, the question had been answered by the only person competent to reply to it. The unfruitful interview was over, and tutor and pupil bade one another good-night with a warm hand-clasp, and one of them at least with dewy eyes. Neither of them was a hero, but they were thorough gentlemen ; they had their full allowance of human weaknesses, but generosity and honour dwelt in them both.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER SORT OF OFFER.

THE parting between Leicester and the Barton family next morning was a very bad quarter of an hour for both parties. Mrs. Barton, who, of course, knew nothing of his generous offer, could hardly have been more upset had she been informed of it; even Rose, though generally so shy and reticent, confessed her sorrow; and though Clare said nothing, and did not even return the significant pressure of the young fellow's hand, lest it should give him false hopes, her face spoke for her. Fortunately he had to catch an early train, so that the farewell was soon over. He had had to breakfast, or rather to pretend to do so—for it seemed to him that every morsel would have choked him—much before the usual hour, but they got up to “see him off.” Most of us, unhappily, know what that means—the morn of that disastrous day on which some dear one leaves us is well remembered; how full of wretchedness and discomfort; how different from the common-place cheerfulness of other mornings.

Mrs. Barton was the least to be pitied, for she was busied with the providing for the creature comforts of her departing guest upon the journey. Rose, too, gathered for him the late autumn flowers that could yet be found in the garden. Clare gave him nothing save, alas, what she had already given him, which was her all, and that he was not to know. Not till the fly had taken him away, and become but a black spot on the chalky hill, could she breathe freely. To go to her

own room and give vent to her passionate woe, as she yearned to do, was impossible; her absence from the family circle—which, moreover, could just then little afford to be broken—might have awakened suspicion. She had to listen to their praise of the departed guest, and join in it. If she had been free to speak, how different, indeed, would have been her words from theirs, tender and regretful though they were. Mr. Barton—his occupation gone—after breakfast, proposed a walk over the Downs; the fresh air, he thought, would, in their state of despondency, do them all good; but for that Clare felt herself utterly unfitted. This surprised them, for she was always the one most ready for vigorous exercise; but she pleaded a sick headache, and they presently left her alone at home.

It was strange enough, but now she had the opportunity of indulging in the luxury of woe, her desire for it had fled; she was not, as Avis would have expressed it, "one of the crying sort." This is not always an advantage. She envied Rose, who could weep away her grief, and had, as her sister thought (though in this she was quite mistaken), already "got over" her trouble as regarded Rivers. Clare's own room was this morning distasteful to her, because, like that of her sister, it looked out upon the Downs. She dared not even, in imagination, follow Guy upon his way. She therefore betook herself to the drawing-room; its windows, indeed, commanded the sheltered walk where her interview had taken place with him upon the previous day; but whither was she to go that held no memory of her lost lover? For lover he was, for all that had happened. It was curious, considering that she had entreated him to forget her, and meant too what she had said, what pleasure this reflection afforded her. In this respect

her feelings towards him resembled those of her father, who had also rejected an offer of another kind, and yet found it a comfort to him. What would Guy do when he got home? Where would he henceforth live? How occupy himself? It could make no sort of difference to her, yet she found herself speculating on these things. Separation, however complete, was not, it seemed, oblivion.

Suddenly she was recalled to herself by the ringing of the front-door bell. They had but few visitors, and the hour besides was too early for them. She concluded, however, it was Dr. Greystone, who, under pretence of a morning call, had probably come to see her father. He had, she knew, noticed the change in his appearance since his misfortune had fallen upon him, and her mother had asked him to look in. The servants knew she was in the drawing-room, and if the doctor wished to see her, he would be sure to do so; apparently he did wish it, for she heard the front door close, and a man's step in the hall. Then the servant entered the room and announced Mr. Giles.

Clare had no particular reason for avoiding the rector, but an interview with any person was extremely distasteful to her under present circumstances, and it was with difficulty that she could control her countenance so as to avoid showing the visitor that he was unwelcome; she contrived, however, to do so.

"My father, I am sorry to say, is not at home, Mr. Giles," she said, with a forced smile.

"I am glad of it—that is to say," he hurriedly corrected himself, "of course I didn't mean that, but my visit is of a purely domestic character."

"Unfortunately, my mother is also absent; they are gone for a walk upon the Downs."

"Yes, I met them as I was riding over the hill, and well—the fact is, I called to see you, Miss Clare."

"To see *me*?" Clare was astonished, and also a little alarmed; Mr. Giles's words were surprising enough, but his appearance was also strange; his usually colourless face was flushed, and his manner, always nervous, was excited to an extreme degree.

"Yes, to see *you*," he reiterated, with his hand upon his heart. It struck her that this was not intended as an act of gallantry, though she now guessed only too well what he had come about, but rather as the action of one in physical pain; she felt vaguely that there was "something the matter" with Mr. Giles.

"You are astonished, and no wonder, Miss Clare, if, as I believe, you guess my errand. No one can be more conscious than myself how little I deserve the happiness I seek. How very, very highly I esteem and—and—honour you. Not that I am honouring you in offering my hand and heart; no, no, I do so, believe me, with every sense of inferiority. I do not so much love you, though I love you beyond measure, as worship you."

However strange and exaggerated Mr. Giles's method of expressing himself might be, there could be no doubt of its truth and earnestness.

"I am afraid," said Clare, with a sort of desperate simplicity, "that you very much overrate my character, and indeed are mistaken about me in many ways."

"Not as to your character, not as to your noble nature," interrupted the other, impetuously; for, now that he had once found his tongue, his words flowed fast enough. He had conned them for many a day, and his theme was before him. "But as to 'other

ways,' let me beg of you to consider the matter. I did not expect—how could I?—that my proposal should not take you by surprise. Up to this moment I have never, I am well aware, given you even a hint of the affection—nay, the adoration—with which I have regarded you. My reverence for you has been too great—and—and—as you know, I am painfully shy."

There was bathos in that speech, but also pathos; its humility touched the girl, as well it might.

"I am at a loss to understand you, Mr. Giles," she said. "The view you have taken of me has been far too generous, but the delicacy and forbearance you have shown towards me I fully appreciate. I only regret——" but here with a sort of feverish apprehension he broke in again.

"What you say of me, Miss Clare, is beyond my deserts, but if only a little of it is true, your saying it makes easy for me what would otherwise be a difficult task indeed; for, if in your kindness you credit me with any sort of good feeling, you will not accuse me, in what I am about to say, of vanity and presumption. If there were any hope, as I well know there is none, of your reciprocating the feelings I entertain for you, I should be spared the necessity of urging a plea, which is only too open to misconception; but I have no doubt in the matter. When a man's chief argument fails him, he is compelled to urge other and far slighter pleas to help his advances, and I am obliged to remind you that, in addition to all the heart I have, I am at least in a position to offer you a sufficiency of means and a comfortable home, which will be open to those you love as long as I live."

He had struck the right chord at last. Clare was not only moved but agitated. What he had said, how-

ever strangely expressed, was indeed but the echo of her own thoughts. When she thought of her father's position, on the brink of ruin, with failing health, and without hope or help, she asked herself the question, ought she not to sacrifice herself for his sake and for those dependent on him? Had she a right to dismiss this suitor, so genuinely attached to her, and generously inclined to her and hers, merely because she did not love him? There was no suggestion in such a course that "love would grow," or that his constant kindness, which she did not doubt, would turn the regard she was really beginning to entertain for him into anything warmer: she knew it never could. The sole question she was putting to herself was, "What is my duty?"

He seemed to read her very soul as he went on: "I feel, alas, how unresponsively your heart beats to mine, but oh, Miss Clare, such a very little love on your part would suffice for me, and surely, surely, as the days went on, and you found my affection—my devotion—never flagged, you might come to think of me a little more kindly, a little more blindly, to forget what is amiss with me, and remember that I have given you at least of my best."

Again his humility touched her. He was never so near his object as in that fateful moment; but even while he was speaking, her eyes, in her perplexity, wandered to the window, and fell again upon the spot where, not twenty-four hours ago, Guy had declared his love. The recollection was too strong for her, she could not, *could* not yield herself to this unloved man.

"Mr. Giles," she said, "you have won my life-long respect and gratitude. I feel, as any woman should do, the honour you have done me, and I thank you for it

with all my heart; but I can never, never be your wife."

"Do not say never," he said, with deep emotion. "At all events, let me know that there is not the one insurmountable obstacle against which it is vain to plead. Tell me at least that you do not love another?"

"You have no right," she began, but such a shocking change had come over her companion's face that alarm checked her words. His lips had become white as ashes, his face was almost purple. She reached out her hand for the bell, but he made one impassioned gesture of dissent. Then gradually—very gradually—he became himself again.

"I am going away," he said, in a changed and husky voice. "I will never trouble you again, Miss Clare; I am not quite well."

There was something childish, but also very pathetic, in his trembling tones.

"I am sure you ought to take something; a glass of wine?" she inquired, anxiously.

He nodded. She ran into the dining-room and brought a decanter of sherry and a glass for him. Strange as the proceeding was, it seemed perfectly natural to her. She was under the impression that he had been on the brink of some physical catastrophe.

He took one glass, quietly rose from his chair, and murmured an inarticulate something, she recognised afterwards for what it was, but which sounded like "good morning;" then with a very grave, sad face he turned and left the room without even raising his eyes to hers.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RESIGNATION.

As the door closed behind Mr. Giles, Clare seemed to awaken from some monstrous dream. What had occurred during the last half hour—for no longer had the interview lasted—had been so unexpected, so full of surprise, emotion, and alarm, that it appeared something quite apart from her daily life, and to lack reality. It was not till after a few minutes that she was able to recall what had happened, and even then but vaguely, and without sequence. She was well aware, however, that she had refused Mr. Giles. It could not be said that she was sorry that she had done so, though she was certainly sorry for *him*; she felt a pity, and even tenderness for him, which an hour ago would have seemed impossible; but that circumstance did not prevent her from picturing him as a husband with a shudder. But she had great doubts as to whether she had done right in refusing him; it was a selfish act, no doubt, and the question was, whether upon the whole it had been justifiable. There had been a moment, she knew, in which she had been on the verge of accepting him, not for his own sake, indeed, but for that of those she loved; and she had only been prevented from doing so by an impulse, an accident; the sudden calling to mind of one whose love she had declined to accept. If she had given the matter a fair consideration, ought not duty to have outweighed the sentiment, however genuine and tender, to which she had previously declined

to listen? If, during the last few days, and before Guy had made that open declaration of his love, Mr. Giles had made his offer, it was possible she would have accepted him; had she, then, the right to sacrifice the well-being of her family because he had made it subsequently?

She knew nothing, of course, of the knowledge of Mr. Giles's intentions possessed by her parents; she thought they would be as much surprised at his declaration of them as herself; but feared they would be dreadfully disappointed—though they might love her too well to show it—at her rejection of him. They were totally unaware of her regard for Leicester, and it would naturally strike them that, in refusing so excellent an offer, she had not chosen to consider the interest of those belonging to her, but only her own feelings. Daughters had often, in similar cases, sacrificed themselves under much more objectionable circumstances, and when there was less pressing need for it. Penitence—the readiness to undo what she had done—she could not feel, but she did feel remorse. It had been in her power, by one little word, to avert the ruin of the family, to restore health and spirits to her father, to give her mother and sister a comfortable home, and she had refused to speak it; nor was she at liberty to tell them what had been the true reason of her refusal. It is very well for folks (who can afford it) to talk of “affinities” and first loves, and to denounce what they call mercenary marriages, but there are circumstances where the path of duty leads away from the “affinity,” and especially if the obstacles to its being annexed are insurmountable.

At the luncheon hour the walking party returned; Mr. and Mrs. Barton with grave faces enough, for the

servant had told them Mr. Giles had called in their absence, but Rose in good spirits. She felt it right to be as cheerful as she could; the fresh Downs air had had its effect on her; and indeed she was at this time by far the least depressed of the family. This was not only because she knew least about their sad prospects! she had been among the poor all her life, and the thought of poverty was less distressing to her than to the rest.

"So I hear you have had a visitor all to yourself, Clare," she said, cheerily. "That is why you would not go out walking with us, was it? What a sly puss you are."

Never was a well-meant little joke so dreadfully inopportune. Clare felt that, if she tried to laugh at it, her laugh would have ended in hysterics.

"Why did you not ask Mr. Giles to lunch?" inquired Mrs. Barton, hastening to her daughter's rescue.

"He would not stay; indeed, he was not at all well," said Clare; "he had a glass of wine, however, and that seemed to do him good."

"It was nothing serious, I hope?" observed Mr. Barton.

"Well, I hope not, papa; but he really rather alarmed me. He turned such a very queer colour."

"I have seen him do that before," said Mr. Barton, recollecting the strange appearance of the rector when he had talked to him after his dinner party. "I hope his heart is not affected."

Rose was on the point of saying "I hope not," with a significant glance at her sister; but she reflected that, if the poor man was ill, it would be cruel to make a joke about him. It never entered into her mind that it would be ten times more cruel to somebody else.

On the first opportunity Clare betook herself to her mother's room. "Mamma dear, a very strange thing has happened. Mr. Giles has made me an offer of marriage."

Her mother looked at her, as she thought, in astonishment; she did not understand how that loving heart was beating in gravest expectation.

"Of course," she went on, "it would have been good for us in many ways; I felt that, I thought of that, indeed I did; but I hope it was not selfish of me, I hope you will not think that I might have done it even though I could never love him. But I could not, *could* not do it." She had meant to say something about the material aspects of the matter, as regarded others, but not to excuse herself with such vehemence; but there was something, not exactly pain, but sorrowful disappointment, in her mother's face which evoked excuses.

"My darling," answered Mrs. Barton, in a trembling voice, "I am quite sure that you did what was right."

It was strange that that tender assurance should have an effect the very contrary to that which was designed; but so it was.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, I see I have done wrong," cried Clare. "I should have thought less of myself and more of all of us. He spoke of the pleasure it would afford him to offer Rose a home. It was selfish of me, and I deserve your blame."

"No, my dear, no, you do not deserve it; it was a question for yourself and yourself only," returned her mother, softly. "Don't cry, *don't* cry;" for the poor girl, already overwrought by the trying experience she had gone through, here utterly broke down. "I say again you have done right. If you could have accepted Mr. Giles, in honour and honesty, as a man deserves to

be accepted who makes such a proposal, of course we should have been glad; but if not, if, as you say, you felt that you could never love him, it would have been a wrong to him and your own nature. If you thought of others, as I am sure you did, it was only a temptation which you did right to resist. It will be better for us to suffer poverty than to feel we have escaped some of its stings by the sacrifice of our daughter's happiness, nay, of her sense of right. I do not blame you, darling, no, no, no."

With every word, as she clasped the girl in her arms, there was a kiss, the loving seal of her appreciation.

If it was hypocrisy, the recording angel, as in another case, must have erased the accusation with a tear; but doubtless, in that supreme moment, overcome by pity and a mother's pride, she meant all she said; at all events it did the work it was intended to do, and Clare was comforted.

"You will tell dear papa, of course?"

"Yes, dear, and Rose must know; indeed everyone—that is, Mrs. Jermyn must know. Some explanation must be given of the change of behaviour that will be necessitated as regards Mr. Giles. For the present, at all events, it will be very embarrassing for you to meet him, and much more embarrassing for him, poor man," she added, calling to mind the rector's shyness. For the moment she had forgotten that it would not henceforth be necessary or agreeable to meet anyone; that their social life was about to undergo a complete change; and that certainly the well-endowed rector of Market Overt would not be likely to be brought into contact with them.

"I am sorry that the matter need be made public in any way," said Clare, "but if it must be so, pray be

careful that nothing is said to the disadvantage of Mr. Giles. His behaviour throughout was characterised by a kindness of heart, and good feeling, for which I am now ashamed to say I should not have given him credit."

"And yet, for all that," said her mother, looking curiously at her daughter's downcast face, "and notwithstanding the material advantages of his proposition, you felt that you could not love him."

"Yes, I felt that," she answered, with a little shudder, "and also that I never, never *could*. Oh, mamma, I am so sorry."

There was more talk between them, as happens in such cases, even when the matter on hand is concluded; but nothing of any consequence. For Clare, at least, the past was over; but in her mother's case there was the consideration of the consequences of what had happened. She had known, of course, what they would be all along, but somehow she had hoped that things would have been mitigated, if not averted; and then she had to tell the bad news to her husband.

He was not, indeed, unprepared for it. He thought it likely that things would turn out as they had done, and also he was in that depressed condition of mind when bad news is expected from every quarter; but still, at the first sight of his wife's face as she entered the study, his heavy heart sank deeper within him than ever, for he knew, though, in truth, he scarcely wished it to be otherwise, that their last hope had failed.

"Clare has rejected him?" he said, quietly, and with a smile that was very pathetic to Mrs. Barton, because she knew that he was wearing it for her sake.

"Yes, dear, she has, and she has done quite right."

"I have no doubt of that," he answered, gently.

"One always expects Clare to do right. The fact is, a man is no judge of these things; he is made of coarser fibre; he cannot understand that material considerations, however important, weigh as nothing, in the delicate balance of a girl's judgment, against even a fanciful antipathy. The temptations, however lasting, to act otherwise, are as nothing compared with the immediate prejudice."

Mrs. Barton looked at him with some surprise; it did not strike her that he had been going over the matter scores of times, ever since Mr. Giles had announced his intention of making his offer, and always with a view of justifying his daughter in case of her rejecting it.

"I am afraid, my dear, though you are too kind to say so, that you are disappointed."

"No, my darling, I will not say that, for it would not be true. On the contrary, I am proud of Clare."

"That is spoken like yourself, John. Still, let me put it rather differently. What you say of a girl's distaste, under such circumstances, being far stronger than that of a man exposed to a similar temptation, is of course quite true; but what you felt, I think, was that a sensible girl, such as our Clare is, devoted to her parents and her sister, and always inclined to put them before herself, might for their sakes have taken a different view."

He shook his head. "Yes," she continued, "I cannot help thinking, though I know you approve of the course she has taken, that this idea still hangs about your mind. It would never, I am sure, however sad may be our future lot, cause you to entertain the least resentment against her; but it must *not* exist. There was a reason much stronger than any you have pictured to yourself why Clare could not accept Mr. Giles, which

made it indeed absolutely impossible for her to do so."

"What was that?"

"Her heart has already been given to another man."

"What? Clare told you *that*?" exclaimed Mr. Barton, in astonishment, "that she was engaged?"

"Certainly not, my dear; if she had been she would, without doubt, have told me. Not a word passed her lips upon the subject, but the conclusion I drew from the poor girl's manner was what I have told you. I may be wrong. In any case, I shall never mention it to any ears but yours; but such is my conviction."

"But who can it be, my dear?"

"Upon that, John, I do not think we have any right to speculate. I told you what I think about it, because I tell you everything, and also to remove any lingering feeling in your heart that Clare might have acted differently. But, in fairness to the dear girl herself, let us respect her secret, which, we may be sure, has cost her much to keep."

By what instinct Mrs. Barton had discovered what had been hidden from her so long it is difficult for any but a mother to tell; but perhaps, in her heart of hearts, she had entertained more hope than her husband that Clare would not refuse the very desirable offer that had been made to her, and, since it had been refused, that she had looked more narrowly for the reason. The result of her sagacity, at all events, was, on the whole, beneficial. Neither she nor her husband could doubt who had won Clare's heart, if won it had been; and each of them understood and appreciated the motives which had, in fact, caused her to keep such a secret to herself. The subject was not again alluded

to between them, but it caused them to regard their eldest daughter with a peculiar tenderness, which, though she did not guess the reason, was balm to her wounded heart. For the time, too, it had another advantage in distracting her father's thoughts from the troubles that surrounded him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED CATASTROPHE.

THERE are two sorts of difficulty attendant upon a decreased income; one when it is slightly decreased, and one when it is very much so. In the former case one has to put down "this" and put down "that" and "do without things," and when all is done very little seems to have been saved and a great deal of comfort sacrificed; in the latter case there are no little troubles of this kind—one has not to "cut and contrive," nor even "to pinch and pare," but to part with almost everything, which is comparatively an easy task; on the other hand, there is the question of "How to live?" and this was the difficulty that Mr. Barton and his family had to meet.

Though an indifferent man of business, and very prone to avoid looking disagreeable contingencies in the face, he had not been unmindful of the future of his dear ones, but he had fallen into the common error of preferring to insure his life rather than to put by out of his income. It is much better to do both, but to neglect the latter precaution while taking the former is the more dangerous, since, however one's income is reduced, one still has to pay the premiums. In Mr. Barton's case those payments were considerable, and indeed he saw no means of meeting them and at the same time of supporting his family. The surrender value of his policy was very small, and to accept it left his wife and children utterly unprovided for in case of his decease.

He was still but a middle-aged man, but he felt only too surely that the spring of his life had been snapped, and that old age was not to be looked for.

The last four weeks had indeed wrought a serious change in him, which, though she never spoke of it, caused his wife a sickening apprehension compared with which the prospect of poverty was as nothing. Her breadwinner was just as dear to her even though he had ceased to win bread. Whatever befalls us, at least let us be together, was her constant if mistaken prayer. For the present she had, fortunately, many things to employ her, which prevented her from dwelling upon that possible void; but it cast its shadow on her gentle life.

Mr. Barton had written to Mr. Audrey to explain the change in his circumstances, and his application to be allowed to cut short his tenancy had been acceded to. Whatever may have been the shortcomings of the rector of Leadon, he was a thorough gentleman, and quite incapable of pressing upon an impoverished man. No rent, he said, need be paid after the current quarter, and on the other hand there need be no hurry in the vacation of the rectory house; and in the meantime Mr. Barton would continue to "take the duty." The furniture in general was, of course, the rector's, but there were many articles which belonged to his tenant, and these Mrs. Barton busied herself in setting aside either for sale or possible use in their new quarters. Her husband, with an attempt at a smile, said he preferred that word to "house," since it was impossible they could afford a whole one, however small. In the meantime he took counsel of Mr. Jermyn as to what was best—or least bad—to be done. The Squire, though much his inferior in intelligence, was of a more practi-

cal mind, and had a better acquaintance with the world at large; what at first interfered with his usefulness was his endeavour to persuade the whole family to become his guests at the Hall till better times; in the advocacy of this plan (as he termed it in all seriousness) he was strenuously backed by Mrs. Jermyn. Mr. Barton was deeply touched, but resolute in declining the hospitable offer.

"Till better times," he very justly said, "might be equivalent to the Greek Kalends."

"Then, when you decide to leave the Rectory," said the Squire, rather affronted, "at least let your family stay with us while you look about you for something to do. You will hardly set them down in Leadon lodgings, I suppose, while you are still without employment."

"It is a thing that has often been done," said Mr. Barton, faintly. "My wife and children are not, alas, exempt from the common lot. They have plenty of courage—more courage than I have when I think of what is before them, God help them!"

"Just so, they have plenty of pluck," said the Squire, "but no stamina; of course they will do anything you propose, and with the utmost cheerfulness; do you think my wife and I don't know that? But the point is, are they fitted for such an ordeal? Look at Mrs. Barton; has she strength for such things as you speak of? No, my friend, they must stay with us till matters are a little settled." It was difficult to withstand such arguments advanced in so friendly a fashion.

The best, indeed the only, course open to Mr. Barton seemed to be the taking pupils in London; they would, of course, be a very different class from that to which he had been accustomed, but from which, it was obvious, he was definitely severed. They would come to

him in the day, and for a certain number of hours; he would be, in short, on a small scale, "a crammer." He was to go to town, secure suitable lodgings, and advertise in the papers; his degree at the University had not, unfortunately, been a good one, but perhaps it would serve. What was weak in this plan was, that it was beginning life entirely anew; nothing that Mr. Barton had hitherto done or possessed, except, indeed, the mere habit of teaching, would be of any use to him in his new career. He had no introductions, no recommendations for it of any kind; and it is doubtful whether he recognised the amazing difference of method between those, like himself, who teach the graces of life and those who teach what is immediately necessary for some practical result, such as "an exam."

He was not sanguine, however—nor even hopeful—but, just as when we are oppressed with some ailment for which we can find no cure, it is better to use a remedy in which we have little confidence than to "give ourselves up" and do nothing, so effort at all events seemed preferable to inaction. Indeed, that he must "do something," and that at once, was become a very pressing necessity; only it is a thing not so easily accomplished as recommended. A significant symptom of his need, and of his ignorance of how to supply it, was the consideration he now gave to the advertisements of employments in the newspapers. It seemed better, and certainly cheaper, to read these than to set forth his own capabilities, which, indeed, he would have found some difficulty in expressing. One advertisement, headed "Education," seemed to promise well: "*A Tutor engaged in qualifying candidates for the Army and Civil Service, is desirous of meeting another gentleman to assist him in the work of education. A liberal salary will be*

given; clerk in holy orders preferred, and a good connection absolutely indispensable.—Apply to G. W., Algebra-street, Belgravia." A good connection was italicised, and Mr. Barton foresaw no difficulty in satisfying the advertiser at least upon this point. Plenty of friends, if no patrons, still remained to him; and, as the pupils would not be under his personal care, there would be no fear of any such *fiasco* as that of Mr. Richard Rivers's marriage being repeated to prevent their recommending him. He accordingly communicated with G. W., who wrote back suggesting a personal interview, and in answer to inquiries stated that the salary would be £400 a year, "supposing that matters were otherwise arranged satisfactorily." This latter phrase was a little enigmatical, as Mr. Barton had described his connections and position at some length, so that there did not seem to be much more to be said upon that point; but of course it was not surprising that Mr. George Wheeler (G. W.) should wish to make the personal acquaintance of Mr. Barton, "since," as Mr. Jermyn laughingly put it, "for all he knows, my dear fellow, you may be a black man, which (except, perhaps, in the case of the *India* Civil Service) would be a drawback."

There was no fear, Mr. Jermyn thought, of his friend not making a favourable impression upon G. W., or anyone else, so far as appearance and manners went, except indeed that he had got to look so ill and broken. It was shocking to note what a change had taken place in him, in this respect, in so short a time; and it seemed not impossible that the advertiser might hesitate to enter into any agreement upon a permanent basis with one so fragile and so delicate looking. Mr. Barton was not, indeed, in the ordinary sense, an invalid; but Dr. Grey-stone, as Mr. Jermyn knew, thought ill of him. "He

is of a very nervous temperament, and is fretting himself to fiddle-strings," was his diagnosis.

This projected visit of Mr. Barton to town was an event much looked forward to, and was only delayed because in a few days the doctor himself had to go to London; and, for more reasons than one, it was felt that such a travelling companion would be very desirable. Up to this time no change of a material kind, though in their minds all was change, had taken place in the lives of the family at the Rectory. The servants had all received their month's warning, save one faithful creature, who, at her own earnest intercession, was to follow the fallen fortunes of her mistress and her "young ladies;" but, for the present, everything went on as usual. Except the Jermyns, the Bartons now saw nobody—a circumstance which was owed to the delicacy, rather than the want of sympathy, of their neighbours. It was not known that the Bartons were so soon to leave Leadon; but their misfortunes, at all events in part, were known, and visits, whether of condolence or not, it was felt would be unwelcome. To the tutor and his family it doubtless seemed that they had lost interest in all external matters, and were as dead to the world in which they had once lived as the world was dead to them. If so, however, they did themselves wrong, for it is only the selfish whose feeling for the calamities of others is numbed by the sense of their own misery.

One morning a dreadful report was brought from Market Overt that Mr. Giles had been found dead in his bed. The nature of the catastrophe and its suddenness were a shock to everybody, but much more to Clare and her parents, with their knowledge of what he had sought to be to them.

Their friends at the Hall, of course, also knew of this. Mrs. Jermyn had been inclined to condemn Clare for her rejection of the rector, and even thought it a little selfish of her; with all her sentiment, the kind old lady had some practical ideas. It would have seemed more in accordance with the fitness of things if the girl had fallen in love with Rivers; but, since she had not done so, nor, as it appeared, with anybody else, there seemed to be no sufficient reason for her not marrying Mr. Giles. A love match was the most desirable of matches, but the next best thing to it was an union that would make the greatest number of people happy; whereas Clare had permitted a little personal prejudice to outweigh the happiness and re-establishment of her family.

However, all was over now, and, as it happened, so far as the girl was concerned, for the best. She was now free to marry somebody else (though, alas, it would be difficult indeed for her to find a suitor), which she would not have been—yet awhile at least—had she been engaged to Mr. Giles. Mrs. Jermyn genuinely regretted the poor rector, who had, as we know, made her his *confidante*, and been more friendly with her than any other person of her sex; but she was naturally less shocked at it than the Bartons. For the moment, considerations of their own calamity were forgotten in it. The tutor's visit to town was put off, in order that he might perform the funeral service. There had been no clergyman in the neighbourhood so intimate with the deceased as himself, and, indeed, under the circumstances, he could hardly have declined the office. The invitation had come, through Dr. Greystone, from the late rector's churchwarden. Mr. Giles seemed to have had absolutely no relatives, or none that took any interest

in the matter. This seemed, as it well might, a most amazing circumstance ; but when Mr. Barton spoke of it to the doctor, that gentleman only shrugged his shoulders, and observed that there had been always a mystery about poor Giles.

"His death itself is to me a mystery," said Mr. Barton. "He called at this very house not three days ago. Clare, who happened to be the only one at home, received him ; he did, it is true, complain of not feeling very well."

"Indeed ?" interrupted the doctor. "Did he say what was the matter with him ?"

"No. He had seemed agitated in his manner," she said, "and had turned a very strange colour."

The doctor nodded. "I have been long expecting this," he remarked. Then he told the other how, months ago, he had discovered Mr. Giles had heart-disease, and what precautions he had recommended him. When the doctor had gone, Mr. Barton repeated what he had heard to his family. "Though so sudden," he remarked, "the event was not of course unexpected. Greystone had advised his patient on no account to agitate himself, as it would be likely to prove fatal."

"But he did not surely tell him *that* ?" observed Mrs. Barton.

"Not in so many words, of course, and perhaps he was injudicious in going even so far as he did. He told him that he had had his warning ; and the poor fellow was always repeating to himself, 'I have had my warning,' as though he knew it would be his last."

Clare was silent ; she recalled with a shudder Mr. Giles's parting words to her, which it seemed had not been "Good morning," after all.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A REQUEST FOR A PHOTOGRAPH.

THE Bartons in these days became more frequent guests of the Jermyns than ever; their hostess insisted on it that it made no sort of difference whether there were six at dinner or two, and that it gave her the greatest pleasure to have them; and the latter statement at all events was a correct one. The tutor and his wife had some qualms, but it was certainly much more cheerful for the girls, whom they were anxious to guard against the despondency from which they could not preserve themselves. Husband and wife were secretly not displeased at the delay in Mr. Barton's visit to the advertiser (Mr. Wheeler), since while it had not taken place they could at least have hope in it. If he should go, and fail, matters would look black indeed. It was now arranged that he should travel with Dr. Greystone to London on the day after the funeral at Market Overt. This was attended of course by Mr. Jermyn also, and indeed by every person of note in the neighbourhood. The chief mourners, if they could be called such, were two strangers, said to be the legal adviser and executor of the deceased.

Under such circumstances there could hardly fail to be some comment. Mr. Barton from the nature of his office was precluded from joining in such conversation, but, as the Squire and he walked home together, Mr. Jermyn retailed it. "The general idea," he said, "is that Mr. Giles has no relations of any kind; though he has had the living only a few years he can never have

spent half his income—nearly three thousand a year, you know—so that he must have left a good deal of money.”

“I suppose so,” said Mr. Barton, indifferently; now that his duty was over, his thoughts had reverted to his own affairs; to his visit to Mr. Wheeler on the morrow; and the little hope (as it now seemed as it grew so near) that lay in it.

“He must have left his money to somebody,” observed the Squire. “He was not a man to endow a hospital, or help to pay off the National Debt.”

“One would scarcely think so,” returned the tutor, with a faint smile. “I should imagine there was some relative, whom personally he did not perhaps much care about, to whom he has bequeathed it.”

“It is possible,” said Mr. Jermyn, with a queer look at his companion, which, however, was unnoticed. “Then there is the living,” he continued. “No one seems to know to whom that will go.”

“It is in the gift of the Duke of Bleakshire, I believe.”

“Well, it *was* in his gift. But the Duke’s estate is said to be deeply dipped; he has been very extravagant, and very unlucky on the turf. It is as likely as not that he sold the next presentation.”

“The purchaser must have got it cheap,” returned the tutor, “for it would have seemed that poor Giles was good for the next twenty years at least. I hope, whoever has got it, that he will turn out to be an agreeable neighbour to yourself and Mrs. Jermyn.”

“My dear fellow, there are no neighbours that will fill your place to us.”

“Nor shall we ever find such friends as you and yours elsewhere,” returned Mr. Barton, with emotion.

Dr. Greystone made one of the little dinner party at the Hall that evening, and he too spoke of Mr. Giles.

"From what I hear," he said, "I gather he has died intestate—a thing I am surprised at his having done, considering that he knew his danger."

"There is no man so old, Cicero tells us, but that he believes he will live a year," observed Mr. Barton, "and a young man even in ill-health has, probably, at least the same amount of confidence."

"That is quite true," said the doctor. "Giles was the sort of man who would have disliked making a will, and, besides, I fancy no one had any particular claim upon him."

"He never spoke of his probable successor at the Rectory, then?" inquired Mr. Jermyn.

"Certainly not; he never even thought about it, I should say."

In a corner of the drawing-room the good-natured Squire disclosed a scheme to the doctor which had been in his mind since the morning.

"Why should we not write to the Duke—a round robin, you know—to ask him to give Market Overt to our friend Barton? If he has not sold the next presentation he must give it to somebody——"

"But, my dear fellow," interrupted the doctor, "the Duke *has* sold the next presentation, and not more than a month ago; I did get that much out of his executor. He spoke of it as a stroke of luck for his Grace, notwithstanding that he got very little money for the transaction, on account of poor Giles being, unfortunately, so young a man. If he had held on till now he could not, of course, have sold it at all."

"Then that chance is gone," said the Squire, lugu-

briously, "though a very small chance it had been, even at the best."

He had, however, another string to his bow, as regarded possibilities, which had, we may be sure, been put into his head by his wife. Her sentimental view of life had caused her to picture Mr. Giles, though hopeless and rejected, still consumed with devotion to Clare, and, as he had no relatives he cared for, bequeathing to her a large slice of his fortune. "It would hurt nobody," she said, "and be a very pretty thing to do."

But when she communicated this idea to Mrs. Barton, it did not commend itself to that lady. "If Clare had been engaged to him there would have been nothing to say against it," she replied, "but, as matters stood, I do not think it would have been so 'pretty.' However, my dear Mrs. Jermyn, we need not discuss the point, since we may be quite certain nothing of the kind has occurred."

Which indeed seemed probable; but just as when we are ill our friends are so good as to suggest to us the most unlikely remedies, so when we are suffering from misfortune they will manufacture hope for us out of the most unpromising materials.

It is said that no man could live without hope; though some of us manage to hang on with a starvation allowance of it, the merest modicum; but it is certain that women can do so. The wives of drunkards and gamblers have at heart no hope, and yet they continue to exist and suffer; but they always pretend to hope. Whether in a good cause or a bad cause women are much better hypocrites than men, and even when they know they are beaten they never throw up the sponge. To judge by Mrs. Barton's talk to her husband, you would have thought her full of hope; she thought Mr.

Wheeler's advertisement very promising, but was careful to add that, even if it failed, there was no reason for despondency; but in her heart of hearts was black despair. This was not so much that her common sense told her to distrust advertisements, or that the knowledge of her husband's character made her doubt of his success as a "crammer," but because she perceived the effect which his misfortunes were having upon him. The few words she had contrived to have with Dr. Greystone that evening upon the subject did not give her the encouragement they were designed to give.

"My dear madam, your husband has nothing serious amiss with him at present," he said, "though there is undoubtedly a want of stamina. What is wrong with him is on the nerves. He is too anxious, too impatient to be up and doing, and wretched because there is no work ready to his hand. If a stroke of good fortune was to happen to him, it would act as a tonic. If his interview with this Mr. Wheeler comes to anything, I shall bring him back to you quite another man."

Mrs. Barton thanked the doctor, and made a pretence of being content. "You will take great care of him to-morrow, will you not, and in case things do not turn out well——"

Here her sweet voice was lost, and the kind doctor patted her hand, and said, "Yes, yes; I will keep his spirits up. Never fear."

It would have annoyed Mr. Barton very much had he known of this solicitude upon his account; he would have thought it was treating him like a child or a confirmed invalid; but the truth was he had got to look almost as bad as a man not absolutely kept to his bed could look.

When a nervous man "runs down," as the medical

phrase goes, he runs very fast, and unless something intervenes in the way of a mental tonic—such as good news—he may come unexpectedly to his journey's end.

The "pleasing anxious being" described by the poet, does not suit his case; the anxiety of life not only does not please but destroys him; and as for "good news," it was very unlikely to come Mr. Barton's way.

He slept scarcely at all that night, and rose very early that he might be in time to start with the doctor, who was to call for him.

His wife and he breakfasted alone together, and a most melancholy meal it was; the winter had already come to Leadon, and it was snowing fast. Mrs. Barton shuddered as she thought of the drive her husband would have on the Downs in the doctor's gig. But the doctor had chartered a fly, the only one of which Market Over could boast.

"Why, where is your gig?" exclaimed the tutor, cheerily, as he shook hands with him.

"My gig's at home; you don't suppose I was going to drive back at night in such weather as this without a roof to my head."

Mrs. Barton cast a grateful look at him; she well knew that the doctor went out at all times, and in all seasons, in his gig, and that he had engaged the fly for her husband's sake.

It was a dreary journey even under the best of circumstances. The Downs were in their snow-shroud, and, unrelieved by the fantastic effects of frost and snow upon trees and hedge rows, presented a melancholy spectacle. Mr. Barton sat silent in the vehicle, his features as sharp as the axe which the executioner was wont to turn towards the face of his doomed man. The doctor did not like the look of him. "Lucky I

thought of the fly," he said to himself; "if this man was to catch cold just now, it might go hard with him."

On the platform at the Junction they found Mr. Avis on his way from Oxford, where he had been staying with a friend, to London. Perhaps Mr. Barton would rather not have met him, but he could not help being touched by his hearty greeting, and the genuine manner in which he asked after his wife and daughters. What also pleased him was that the young fellow insisted upon getting into their second-class carriage, though he himself, as befitted his social position, had a first-class ticket. However, what the tutor was really thankful for, though he might have objected to it upon moral grounds, Mr. Avis got the carriage reserved to themselves, through a little pecuniary arrangement with the guard. After a little talk about old times, Mr. Barton relapsed into silence, closed his eyes, and overcome with weariness fell asleep.

"Poor old Bart looks very bad," observed Avis, in a low voice, to the doctor.

"He is bad; not that he has any disease, but is being worried to death by such trouble as you, my young friend, have never known."

"You mean money troubles. Oh, but I have had experience of them. You don't know what a very unwilling banker my Uncle Pud is. He has his own money troubles, and is just now like a bear with a sore head about them. Mr. Giles's death was very unexpected, was it not?"

The suddenness of this inquiry, *apropos des bottes*, drew a faint smile from the doctor, to whom, indeed, Mr. Avis had always been a source of amusement.

"Well, no, not to me," he replied. "His life had been a precarious one for years."

"Really? But you don't think that is the case with our friend here?"

"I do not. As I told you, his trouble arises from mental anxieties."

"If he was free from them you think he would be all right?"

"I don't know about all right, but he would have the same chance of living as other people."

The doctor knew that Avis was connected with wealthy persons, without being aware how entirely dependent he was upon his uncle, and he thought it possible he might be of some use to Mr. Barton, which caused him to be less reticent than was his wont. He told him the object of the tutor's expedition to town, and even asked his opinion about it.

"The thing is quite hopeless," said Avis; "dear old Bart is not cut out for a cram coach. The young gentlemen he would have to deal with require a tighter hand. As for Wheeler, I never heard of him; if it isn't a fraud it will turn out a frost, you may take my word for it."

This was the doctor's own view of the matter; it was probable that his companion knew more about such matters than he did, and his face grew very grave.

"Now, look here," said Avis, speaking very confidentially, "I've got a plan in my head, which it is possible may do old Bart some good. But you must never let on that I had anything to do with it. A doctor, it is said, can be secret as a priest; not that I should tell a priest anything I could help—no, not if I knew it."

"Whatever you say to me will be in the strictest confidence, Mr. Avis."

"I am sure of that, doctor, and the more so since at present, at all events, I am not going to tell you anything. What is absolutely necessary for the success of

my scheme will seem very funny, no doubt, but I must have a photograph of Mr. Barton."

"I have one myself at home, and I will send it you."

"No, that won't do ; it must be a photograph of him taken to-day. If you can send it me to this address it will, I do believe, be to old Bart's advantage."

The doctor knew that, however fond of a joke Mr. Avis might be, he would see none in making fun of his old tutor ; and at all events the thing was worth trying. When they got to Paddington there was an hour to spare before the time fixed for the interview with Mr. Wheeler, and the doctor put the matter to Mr. Barton as a favour to himself.

"What you can want of a portrait of me, my dear doctor, I can't conceive, but I am under too great obligations to you to refuse you anything, however mysterious may be your motive." So the photograph—a most lugubrious one as may be imagined—was taken, and in due course a copy of it despatched to Mr. Avis.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. WHEELER.

THE being photographed is not so bad as having one's portrait painted, because it does not last so long, but it is not an agreeable operation ; yet on the occasion in question Mr. Barton did not object to it. He had an hour to spare before the time appointed for his interview with Mr. Wheeler, and anything was better than the companionship of his own thoughts. Under other circumstances it would have struck him as strange indeed that Dr. Greystone should have made such a request of him, but his anxieties were such that he took no notice of the matter ; the little ordeal scarcely won his attention in view of the greater one that now awaited him.

Algebra-street, Belgravia, has more of Pimlico about it than its address suggests. It is what is called a "back street," and, as our Transatlantic cousins would express it, "not a very good one at that." No. 3, however, for which he was bound, was a house of considerable size, though so very bare in its outward appearance that the casual observer might have been in doubt as to whether it was furnished or unfurnished ; he might also have doubted, if like Mr. Barton he had pulled the bell three times without effect, whether it was inhabited. On the fourth application, however, a page appeared struggling with a jacket too tight for him, as though he had just exchanged a workaday suit for his official one. Even then Mr. Barton was left standing in the little hall while this myrmidon com-

municated with his employer. A door at the right hand stood open, which gave the visitor an opportunity of seeing the apartment within. This was a long, low room, fitted with desks and a blackboard, showing it was devoted to education, but presenting a very unfavourable contrast to the comfortable pupil-room at Leadon. For that, however, Mr. Barton was prepared; cramming means business, and sometimes of a rough-and-ready kind. The little room into which the page ushered him with a "Will you walk into the study, sir?" meant business, too. Poor Mr. Barton thought it looked less like a study than a pantry; it had a deal table covered with green baize, two chairs, an immense pewter inkstand, and Mr. Wheeler.

This gentleman was a man of middle age, but already inclined to baldness, tall and ungainly, with a red goatee beard, sharp, ferret-like eyes, and an artificial smile ill-executed by a pair of thin lips.

"Mr. Barton, I presume?" (for the page had omitted the formality of asking his name). "Glad to see you, sir; take a chair."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Barton, "that I have been compelled to delay my visit from circumstances, as I wrote you, beyond my control."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Wheeler. "Even we crammers can't prevent people dying. As my partner, who has a pretty wit, observed when I told him of the matter, it's an 'exam.,' so to speak, that no fellow can get through."

"I did not understand that you had a partner," observed Mr. Barton. It was a shock to him to find that he would have a second employer, and, to judge by this example of his wit, of the same class as this one.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Leader is my partner; Wheeler and

Leader—rather a good name for a double coach, as he puts it. He is full of fun,—that is, out of study hours; *dulce est desipere in loco*—you are doubtless acquainted with the quotation.”

Mr. Barton bowed acquiescence; he kept repeating to himself “Four hundred pounds a year,” to prevent his dwelling upon the question that was growing importunate. “Is it possible I can pass my life in the society of this person?”

“Yes,” continued Mr. Wheeler, “I have a partner, which indeed is one of the reasons which makes me desire to extend—ahem—my sphere of usefulness. What we want, and I am sure we shall find in you, sir, is not only an efficient assistant, but one who will enlarge our boundaries and introduce us to the best class of pupils.”

“I am afraid you greatly overrate my influence,” observed Mr. Barton. “There should be no misunderstanding upon that point.”

“Oh, we know, we know,” said Mr. Wheeler, significantly, and with a sly smile; “Wheeler and Leader were not born yesterday, nor yet the day before. We have made inquiries, and am happy to say they are satisfactory. You have been connected with some A1 people. Let me see—he referred to a piece of very dirty paper with some notes upon it. Now, there is Lord Melrose.”

“But that is twenty years ago,” said Mr. Barton, with a faint smile.

“No matter; there is a second and third generation in most of these cases. Then there is Lord Ripton and Sir Innes Leicester.”

“But, indeed, Mr. Wheeler, these gentlemen have no sons going into the Military or Civil Services.”

"I don't know about that,—they may not know even themselves,—but it is a nucleus. The ramifications of a connection are infinite. It is true that these A1 pupils are generally not very promising, but when we do get one of them through it is exceedingly useful to us; it is thought to be a miracle,—and indeed *is* a miracle,—and redounds immensely to our credit. They are also always to be relied upon for payment, and that's something in these days. I'd rather see Lord Tomnoddy pass fiftieth in our list than Mr. Jones at the head of the batch. Wheeler and Leader are students of human nature, Mr. Barton, I do assure you."

Poor Mr. Barton had great doubts whether he could even pass fiftieth in this subject as it was understood by the firm in question. Though his disposition was essentially genial, it was fastidious; he was as much at home with his inferiors as with his equals or superiors, but he shrank from vulgar natures, and in his limited experiences of life he had never come across such an individual as his present companion. Could it possibly be necessary to introduce him—as his employer, too—to his wife and daughters? As that idea crossed his mind he found it necessary to repeat "Four hundred pounds a year" to himself—like a charm—with more insistence than ever. His thoughts, perhaps, found some expression in his face, for Mr. Wheeler here observed, "You don't look very strong, Mr. Barton."

"I have had a bad night and a long journey," said the tutor, "but I am not afraid of work, I do assure you."

"It is a cold day," said Mr. Wheeler, "and a little lunch will do you good, perhaps." He produced from a cupboard a tin of sardines, some French rolls, and a

bottle of whisky, knives and forks and glasses, and laid a newspaper he had been reading on the table by way of a cloth. "We are rough and ready here," he said, "but you must excuse ceremony."

The whisky Mr. Barton positively declined, but murmuring to himself "Four hundred pounds a year!" he did his best to partake of this extempore entertainment.

"You need not hurry," said Mr. Wheeler, helping himself liberally to the whisky, "'our whelps,' as Leader calls them, will not be here for half an hour yet. As to your being a little delicate to look at, our work is only severe so long as it lasts; eight hours a day is what everybody is shouting for now, and it is exactly what we've got. From ten to one, from two to five, and a couple of hours in the evening, and all Sunday to lie abed in. But there, I forgot that you were a clergyman. That is a distinct point in your favour; 'Messrs. Wheeler and Leader, assisted by the Rev. John Barton, M.A., late of Wadham College, Oxford,' will look exceedingly well in our advertisement. What did you say? Four hundred pounds a year?" Poor Mr. Barton had uttered his charm a little too loud. "Yes, that's the sum to start with. There will also be the item of commission; five per cent. for every pupil you are the means of sending us; with your connection that ought to come to a pretty penny. I have not quite done yet in the way of explanation. It is a small matter, but I wish everything to be straightforward and above board between us from first to last. Perhaps you'll take a pipe, for I am sorry to say the trade doesn't run to cigars; you needn't mind the pupils smelling the smoke, as I daresay you have to guard against it at home; our lads do just as they like out of

study hours, and we venture to take the same privilege. No? Well, I'm sorry; but you'll excuse *my* lighting up."

Mr. Wheeler lit his pipe, and between the whiffs of it proceeded to expound the last item in his programme.

"I must not forget to say, Mr. Barton, that as a guarantee of good faith we shall expect you to have a little pecuniary interest in our undertaking—say two thousand or even fifteen hundred pounds, and you will, of course, share to that extent in our dividends."

"I have not fifteen hundred pounds in the world, sir," said Mr. Barton.

"Well, say a thousand pounds; with your connections, if you have not got it, you can get it. For myself, I should be ready to waive this stipulation altogether, but Leader has made a point of it."

"Then it is unnecessary to prolong this interview," said Mr. Barton, rising from his chair. "Without saying that it has been brought about by false representations, it would certainly not have taken place if you had been more frank and candid from the first. Your item of commission does not commend itself to me; but your request that I should invest money in your business would, even if I had it, be out of the question."

"Then did you really think that you were going to get four hundred a year as our assistant?" exclaimed Mr. Wheeler, his artificial smile narrowing to a sneer. "It is plain you don't know the world, sir, and least of all that portion of it which is known as Wheeler and Leader."

Mr. Barton felt that this at least—however open to doubt might be Mr. Wheeler's other statements—was perfectly true; a man of the world would never have been induced to come to Algebra-street by the simple

bait which *he* had swallowed. From the moment he had entered the house, he had felt his mission to be a failure; but he had not suspected fraud. Now, as the front door closed behind him, he doubted the existence of Mr. Leader and even of the pupils; it was long past two, and they had put in no appearance yet. He felt that he had been made a fool of—if, indeed, he was not a ready-made one—and taken in.

While in Mr. Wheeler's presence, indignation had supported him, but now he became the prey of despondency and disappointment—nay, almost of despair. The sense of his utter helplessness fell upon him like a blight. What a home-coming he would have that night; what miserable news to tell his dear ones!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GOOD LUCK AT LAST.

It was fortunate for Mr. Barton that he had so good a friend as Dr. Greystone to meet him at the station and accompany him on that melancholy return journey. Even when our friends can be of no material help to us in our troubles, their very companionship is unspeakably welcome, save to those exceptional natures which, when in sorrow, yearn for solitude, as the rat seeks his hole to die. Mr. Barton was none of this kind; he told his story to the doctor, well knowing that it would meet with the sympathy of which he felt in need.

"I was afraid how it would turn out," said his companion. "Avis told me that he had never heard of Wheeler as a cram coach, and he knows a good deal about things."

"But why did he not tell me?"

"Because he is too kind-hearted a fellow to depress a man unnecessarily; he did not know it for certain, remember. I feel sure that young fellow has a great regard for you, Barton."

But the tutor did not reply. He could no longer fix his attention to outside matters. He kept an almost unbroken silence throughout the journey; but still, it was well for him to feel that a friend was by.

On the other hand, the reflection well nigh overwhelmed him that the time was at hand when he and his must depart into a world where they would have no friends. It may seem strange that this should be

the case, when, up to short a time ago, Mr. Barton had had, apparently, so many friends.

It was true that he had been popular with his clients and greatly respected by them ; but as a rule they were persons of much higher rank, and his relations with them had been more or less official. It is probable that several of them had the wish and the power to be of service to him—Mr. Jermyn thought it strange indeed that he did not apply to them—but the tutor was almost as proud as he was poor, and his very independence of character was here a disadvantage to him. If his wife had suggested such an appeal, he might, perhaps, have made it ; but Mrs. Barton—though on her husband's account and not on her own—was as proud as he. She could not bear to picture him going, cap in hand, to those whom he had never hither treated as his patrons.

As to herself and her daughters, however, it was a different matter, and already had she written, at their urgent request, to some of her lady friends, with respect to their going out as governesses. It was a terrible thing to think of Clare, and still more of shy and retiring Rose, separated from her loving care, and making their living among strangers ; but, if their father's hopes in Mr. Wheeler should fail, it was necessary, she felt, that this should be done. On so lamentably small an income as was left to them four persons could not be maintained. It was easy to say : "Let us and our dear ones live on together, no matter how poor we may be," but in their case it could not be done.

Nothing of this, however, had been told to her husband ; she knew how the idea of such a plan would distress him, and wisely resolved to say nothing about it until the matter had been arranged, and opposition

to it would be too late. But when he came home that night with his worn, sad smile and melancholy attempt at cheerfulness, which did not deceive her as to the result of his errand for an instant, it was difficult to hold her peace upon the one topic that seemed to offer hope. It was, as he had foreseen, a dreadful homecoming for both of them. The very external comforts which still surrounded them, the large well-furnished room, the cheerful fire, the simple but tasteful supper with which she had provided him, suggested the very different mode of life that awaited them, and accentuated their misery. The two girls received their father with loving welcome, and, as was natural, when they heard his news, with less gloomy forebodings for the future; but even their presence increased their parents' despondency, though for different reasons; the father said to himself, "How shall I give them bread?" the mother's reflection was, "How shall I bear to part with them?"

In their discussion upon ways and means that night, it was settled that Mr. Barton should advertise for a curacy (if possible with a little house), which with what they possessed would give them perhaps £150 a year, out of which there would be the premium for his insurance to pay. It was a dark lookout indeed. Still, for the next day or two, when his parish work was over, it interested Mr. Barton to compose the best account of himself he could truthfully make, and to despatch it to the various Church papers, while Mrs. Barton and the girls were secretly engaged in forwarding their own plan in the issue of which they had some hope; though, indeed, success in it could only be less unwelcome than failure.

Such was the position of affairs when a certain cir-

cumstance took place astonishing in itself, but infinitely more so in its results, which put an end to all these poor devices for livelihood by rendering them unnecessary.

The carriage sweep in front of Leadon rectory had long been unmarked by wheel or hoof, as regarded visitors, and considerable excitement was caused to the family by the appearance there one afternoon of a fly from the station.

Mr. Barton hoped and believed it was some clergyman who, in answer to his advertisement, had driven over to make his personal acquaintance before engaging him, but, as it turned out, it was not the least like a clergyman—but, so to speak, rather the contrary—for the man who stepped out of the fly, as the tutor observed from the study window, was no other than Mr. Puddock.

“Now what on earth brings *that* man here?” thought Mr. Barton to himself, with no great enthusiasm of welcome. Even in the days of his prosperity, to receive Mr. Puddock with an appearance of satisfaction had always been rather a trial; but to do so now, in his state of anxiety and trouble, would, he felt, be almost beyond his powers. Still, there was nothing wanting in the way in which he held out his hand to his visitor, though the tone of his welcome had little ring in it.

Mr. Puddock held his hands for some seconds with quite a kindly sympathy, though it somehow struck the tutor that his manner of doing so was like that of a doctor feeling his pulse.

“You are not looking so well as when I last saw you, Mr. Barton, I am sorry to see; a peg too low, I fear.”

“There is not much the matter, thank you,” said the tutor, a little stiffly, for he did not like his visitor’s

familiarity, and, still less, the scrutinising air with which he regarded him from head to foot.

"Well, let us hope not," said Mr. Puddock, "but you're thin; fallen in a bit, I think; and you must take care of that cough of yours."

"You are very good," said Mr. Barton, "but my cough is more troublesome to others than myself, I believe. I hope your nephew is well."

"Oh, he's well enough, but I can't say he's doing much for himself, but that is not your fault; I didn't send him to you to be made useful, but only ornamental. Let us hope he's that, though, for my part, I'm no judge. However, I didn't come here to talk of Master Avis, but on a business of my own—and yours——"

"On business of mine?" answered Mr. Barton. "I cannot conceive—my dear, this is Mr. Puddock, whom you know."

Mrs. Barton had entered the room; true to her unselfish instincts, she had come with the intention of taking a visitor she knew was antipathetic to her husband, off his hands.

"Mr. Barton," she observed, "is, I am sorry to say, Mr. Puddock, far from well."

He nodded, not so much in sympathy, as it seemed, as in adhesion. "He looks off colour, and, as I was telling him, has a nasty cough."

"I am afraid he is scarcely equal to much conversation," said Mrs. Barton, by no means pleased with this diagnosis. "Would you mind telling *me* what you have to say."

"Not at all," said the visitor, who certainly was not one to easily take offence; "I never mind a sensible woman being present, unless it is a talk on money mat-

ters, with which my errand to-day has nothing to do; but Mr. Barton must be present also, because, as you will see, it concerns him rather nearly." And Mr. Puddock smiled a genuine smile, as though he were making a good bargain, or, at all events, having made a bad one, is getting out of it better than he expected.

"The fact is," continued Mr. Puddock, "though you will perhaps be surprised to hear it, you see in this humble individual the patron of a living. The next presentation to a benefice is, in fact, in my gift, and it is *that*, Mr. Barton—since, as I gather, your residence at Leadon is coming to an end—I am here to-day about."

"I am afraid, Mr. Puddock," said the tutor, gravely, "that your errand will be but loss so far as I am concerned. In the first place, I have got no money for any such investment; and secondly, if I had, I should be committing simony by offering it to you."

"I do not think, my dear," said Mrs. Barton, gently, "that Mr. Puddock wants you to give him money."

"Now there's a sensible woman," exclaimed that gentleman, triumphantly; "she can read faces, you see, Mr. Barton, as you and I can read print. I can't say that I don't want a man's money, be it who it will, for that would be contrary to nature; but it is quite true that I am not going to ask for yours. It is a much simpler, and, for you, a much more agreeable errand that brings me here. I have a good deal more to do with parsons, Mr. Barton, than you have any idea of, and I am bound to say in the whole range of my clerical acquaintances I know of no better man—no man more fitted to occupy the post I have in my mind—than yourself. There is a certain living now vacant in which, in short, I propose to place you without delay, should the idea be agreeable to you."

"Mr. Puddock," said the tutor, "I do hope you are not in jest; I cannot think you would play a practical joke on a man in my position, of the nature of which you can be hardly ignorant; but at the same time your proposal is so strange and unexpected that I scarcely dare to think it to be genuine."

"My dear sir," returned Mr. Puddock, in an aggrieved tone, "I never joke on matters of business, and very seldom out of them. My offer is a perfectly serious one, and the living in question well worth your acceptance."

"That it would be in any case," said Mr. Barton; "when I tell you that I am now advertising for a curacy, and that a hundred a year and a cottage are the summit of my desires, you may imagine that I shall be easily satisfied."

"Well, my living is more than a hundred a year, and has a rectory as good as this one," said Mr. Puddock, smiling. "It is also not a great way off, so that removal will be convenient. Now, I dare say that clever wife of yours has guessed already where it is."

Mrs. Barton was piecing together in her mind certain talk about the Duke of Bleakshire she had heard the last time she had been dining at the Hall, little thinking at the time it could have the smallest personal interest for her.

"Why, you don't surely mean, Mr. Puddock," she exclaimed in great excitement——

"Yes, I do," interrupted that gentleman; "your wife has got it, Mr. Barton; I knew she would. You're the rector of Market Overt as soon as you like to read yourself in."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT THE COUNTIES CLUB.

It has been truly said that the statement, "The news is too good to be true," has nothing corresponding to it as regards bad news. "Unmerciful disaster follows fast and faster," and we never doubt of its reality; but of good news we say, "Can it really be?" Such were the doubts in the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Barton when their visitor had departed; they sat looking at one another wide-eyed and silent, not daring to congratulate one another upon the immense good fortune that had befallen them. It was true that Mr. Puddock had left certain forms and documents behind him, relating to the ecclesiastical government of Market Overt, and the steps it would behove its new rector to take; but even these failed to establish their faith; they almost expected them to turn into leaves before their eyes, like the unsubstantial gifts in the Arabian Nights. So doubtful, indeed, did the tutor feel about the matter—which, nevertheless, filled him with an inexpressible joy and gratitude—that he went down to the Hall to consult upon it with his friend the Squire.

"You look better this morning, much better, I am glad to see, Barton," were Mr. Jermyn's first words.

"I *am* better, my dear friend," replied the tutor. "Indeed, if what has just happened to me turns out to be true, I am quite well; but if, on the other hand, there should be nothing in it, I believe the disappointment will kill me." Then he told the Squire all he had to tell.

Mr. Jermyn listened with delight tempered with

amazement. "Well, if it was not for *these*," he said, pointing to the documents, which the other had been careful to bring with him, "I should have thought Mr. Puddock was playing a very cruel practical joke upon you; but he can scarcely have gone the length of committing forgery. What has happened seems to me to be obviously this. Mr. Puddock, who, from what you have told me of him, has many irons in the fire, has been speculating in livings. He bought the next presentation to Market Overt of the Duke of Bleakshire, and doubtless got it cheap, since the rector was a young man—with the object of selling it at a higher figure; but through poor Giles's sudden death, he was unable to sell it at all; he was obliged to give it away to somebody, and he very properly selected you."

"But that's the point," observed the tutor; "why on earth did he select *me*? I have no reason to suppose that he has any regard, nor indeed any particularly good opinion of me—indeed, to judge from our interview a month or two ago, rather the reverse. Yet here he comes and gives me a living worth I don't know how much."

"I know," said the Squire; "it's the best living in the south of England, and worth nearly three thousand a year."

"When you say that," said Mr. Barton, "the whole thing seems absolutely incredible again; why should he have selected me? His object is to get it vacated as soon as possible. Why did he not give it to some very old man?"

"To be sure, that's strange enough," said the Squire, though looking at his companion's wasted form and haggard face, he did not think it so very strange. This was an explanation, however, he could hardly offer.

Moreover, there still remained the problem how Mr. Puddock had got to know that the tutor's health had so generally failed of late.

Although, in short, the Squire was decidedly of opinion that Mr. Puddock's offer was a *bond fide* one, he could not help the tutor as to that gentleman's motive, but strongly advised Mr. Barton to communicate with the Bishop at once.

That very evening, as it happened, in a place far removed from Leadon, and in great contrast with it, namely, the smoking-room of a London club, the whole explanation of the matter was given by the man of all others most qualified to speak of it. "The Counties" is one of the most exclusive of London clubs. It does not aspire to number among its members persons of genius, *raconteurs*, "smart people," or millionaires, but it prides itself on admitting only "the best people;" nor are these again, as the name would seem to imply, the most moral or religious of the community, but persons of exceptionally good birth and position. It was no wonder that the son and heir of Sir Innes Leicester should be a member of this club, but it did astonish a good many people to find Mr. Robert Avis there. How he got in was only known to the committee, though perhaps his uncle, Mr. Puddock, might have made a shrewd guess at it, but his proposer and seconder had been two peers of the realm, though how their "personal knowledge of the candidate" (*vide* bye-laws) could have been acquired seems strange, since neither of them had ever spoken a word to him.

In "The Counties" club, at all events, was Mr. Avis, like a fish out of water as regarded its social atmosphere, but, as respected his own position there, perfectly at home. He was not an easy person to snub, nor, unless

that operation was carried on in a very decisive manner, was he conscious that he was undergoing it. If people did not appreciate his humorous sallies and his apt quotations from the poets, that was not his fault; they had the opportunity of doing so, and if they missed it, it was their loss, not his. Except with a few ancient noblemen, whom he described as titled fossils, Mr. Avis was of opinion that he was popular in the club; but he did not often find himself engaged in conversation. It was, therefore, a great pleasure to him when he chanced to meet Leicester at the "Counties," and if the joy was not reciprocal the latter did not show it, but was always perfectly good-natured and kind to his old fellow-pupil. His friends could not understand why he was so "confoundedly civil to that cad Avis," and supposed it was because his uncle had been lending him money, which was the last thing of which he stood in need.

On the evening of the day on which Mr. Puddock had visited Leadon, Leicester was in the smoking-room of the club, when Avis entered it, and at once flew to his one companion. "So glad to see you, old man; I've got such news for you as will make you roar."

Mr. Avis spoke, as usual, in rather a loud voice, and a good many heads, with cigars in their mouths, turned languidly in his direction; poor Guy did not like to be roared at, nor had he any desire to be made to roar.

"What is it all about?" he inquired; "and since I am not deaf, would you mind speaking to me instead of addressing the company generally?"

From this it will be gathered that Guy Leicester had reaped some experience of life, and was not so much at Avis's mercy as he had been at Leadon. Perhaps the knowledge of their respective positions in the club—

though he was a very modest young fellow by nature—had helped him to this comparative independence.

"I've a deuced good mind not to tell you," said Avis, but with a decided drop in his voice, "since you seem to be so shirty; but the fact is, it is rather a private matter. It's about 'old Bart,' in whom I know you feel an interest—a good stroke of luck has happened to him."

"Indeed?" Leicester's face lit up at once, and he made room for Avis beside the couch on which he was sitting.

"Yes, old Bart has got the living of Market Overt."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Leicester, excitedly. "Do you mean to say the Duke of Bleakshire has given him *that*; it's the only one good thing I ever heard of his doing."

"The Duke be hanged. It was I who gave him the living."

"I don't thank you for joking about the misfortune of Mr. Barton and his family," said Leicester, very coldly.

"But it is quite true; although it is also one of the best jokes you ever heard of. This is the story. I met old Bart the other day coming up with Doctor Grey-stone to London, to answer an advertisement about being an assistant tutor to a cram coach; a most unpromising errand, as you may imagine. He was looking most awfully ill. The doctor told me that his misfortunes were simply breaking his heart, though he had no organic disease, and would be as fit as a fiddle, in fact, if only he could have a little prosperity. Now I knew that my Uncle Pud had been speculating in souls lately and had bought the next presentation to Market Overt of the Duke of Bleakshire. It was not from philanthropic motives, you may be sure, but to sell again, which it would have seemed there was plenty of time to do, since the incumbent was quite a young

man, but Giles, as you know, popped suddenly off the hooks, and, as it is not lawful to sell a living when vacant, he was compelled to give it away. He had been driving about the country in search of the very oldest and weakest divine he could find as objects of his benevolence, but he had not yet discovered one he could depend upon to die within six months or so. But poor old Bart looked as though he had already one leg in the grave. A great inspiration seized me. Under pretence of affection for him (which indeed I feel) I got the doctor to persuade him to sit for his photograph, and carried it off to Uncle Pud. 'Here's a poor parson,' I said, 'who couldn't, I should think, live three months, far less six, and for whom I know you entertain friendly feelings. Let him have a quarter's income of the living of Market Overt before he goes.' Uncle Pud really does rather like old Bart, and the photograph looked so ghastly that it seemed to promise 'good business;' so, to cut a long story short, he gave him the living to-day, and he may be inducted into it as soon as he likes. I hope he will live for the next twenty years, as Greystone said he might. Now if *that* is not a good joke," concluded Mr. Avis, emphatically, "I should like to know what is."

Guy Leicester was quite as pleased at this news as the narrator could have expected him to be, but it was not the humorous side of the story that struck him most forcibly. It had always been a complaint with Avis that Leicester was deficient in appreciation of a joke, and perhaps it was so, for, after a friendly parting with his old fellow-pupil, he went straight home, with a face, not indeed sorrowful, but grave. "I must speak to the Governor," he said to himself, "this very night."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CHANGE OF QUARTERS.

It was no sooner known in the neighbourhood that Mr. Barton had been presented with the living of Market Overt than the question was put by a hundred tongues, "Why was it given to him?" The clergy of the district were not exactly jealous, for none of them had been disappointed. They had no more expectation of such a spiritual windfall than of being made bishops. Mr. Barton, too, was very popular, and known to be much in need of preferment. But, just as it has been said that there is no man so rich but that he is very pleased to get a thousand pounds, there was no rector or vicar in the county to whom the living of Market Overt would not have been acceptable. Indeed, I am afraid Mr. Barton had never been so little in favour as at this moment of his unexpected prosperity; and though no improper motive was suggested as regarded the munificent donor, it was thought by every divine, without exception, that he might have made a more judicious choice. The rural dean of the district, who felt it was owed to his official position to know the rights of the case, appealed in vain to Mr. Jermyn upon the matter. He could only tell him that the patron of the living, one Mr. Puddock, had conferred it upon the tutor without solicitation. "Was Mr. Puddock a friend of Mr. Barton's?" inquired the dean, and Mr. Jermyn was compelled to admit that he was no especial friend, but that a nephew of his had recently been his pupil. "Then *that* could not have been the reason," exclaimed

the dean, in evident allusion to recent events. Then Mr. Jermyn grew wroth for his friend, and stated that all he knew was that Mr. Puddock, in bestowing the living, had used some very complimentary expressions, and declared he could lay his hand upon no better man. Mr. Barton had the highest testimonials.

But here the dean broke in with pardonable impatience, "Testimonials, my dear Jermyn; if he had testimonials from the Archangel Michael they would not have got him such a living as Market Overt," which seemed, indeed, very likely to be true.

Still, what was after all the chief point, Mr. Barton had got the living; and no one who has not felt the want of one, as he had done, can understand the delight of getting it. His time of trial had been very short, but it had been very sharp. Poor Mrs. Barton used pathetically to say that, though they had had much cause for happiness for so many years, her experience of the last few months seemed to have wiped all out; but, if the average had thus hitherto been maintained, the balance was now struck very decidedly in their favour. They gave thanks where it was due, we may be sure, for what, in the apt language of the Prayer-book, they had neither desired nor deserved. It is not usual for ambitious Man to be gratified beyond his dreams, but, in the case of Mr. Barton (though, indeed, he had never been ambitious), this had certainly happened. It was like some gorgeous transformation scene, in which the demon of Want and Woe had been scared away by the good Fairy. He had found it almost impossible to find means even for the Present of his dear ones, but now their Future and their Present were both provided for. He could hardly prevent himself from going up to the office at once and quadrupling

his insurances, but Dr. Greystone pointed out to him that, until his haggard and careworn look had passed away, this would be a most injudicious proceeding. And it was quite extraordinary how they were already beginning to pass away, like those of a convalescent after fever. His trouble, indeed, left its mark as long as the tutor lived, but it was only upon the mind; and the impression was a wholesome one.

He had always been quick to feel for the wants of others, but he had never before understood their pressing nature, or what poverty really means to those who foresee its approach without the means of evading its icy hand. It is not to be supposed, whatever his neighbours may have thought of Mr. Barton's good fortune, that they were not ready enough to congratulate him upon it. There was no deficiency of morning callers now. It was pleasant enough to receive their felicitations, but the hearts of the whole family turned to their friends at the Hall as expanding flowers turn to the sun. These were the friends that had stood by them in their adversity, and in whose gladness at their prosperity there could be no shadow of doubt. Once more the two elder ladies mingled their tears together, but they were tears of another kind. The Squire himself was deeply moved, though he concealed his feeling under a mask of cheerfulness.

"It is curious, my dear Barton," he said, "how your wish that we should have pleasant neighbours at Market Overt, after you had left Leadon, has been realised; for you see, we have got the very people there we wanted." The first visit of the family to their new rectory had its drawbacks; they could hardly help thinking of the man the loss of whom had been their gain, and Clare in particular did not forget the genuine

tenderness—though it had been impossible for her to return it—with which he had regarded her. Still it was only natural that the beauty of their new home should arouse their admiration. Mrs. Barton had never had a home of her own before, and the female mind that is not comforted by such a possession is not to be found on the earth's surface. Her husband could not help contrasting his present feeling of gratitude and happiness with the wretchedness that had possessed him on the last occasion when he had crossed that threshold. Though the least excited of the party, Rose's content perhaps was most complete.

She had looked forward to the lot which Fate, it seemed, had imposed upon her—that of becoming a governess—with secret aversion; she was essentially a home-bird, and the thought of living amongst strangers had depressed her to the last degree. This fear had now been removed, and she felt another and brighter being. Happiness of the more emotional kind would never be hers; its possibilities had vanished on the day that Richard Rivers had carried off his bride. But she had taken a great pleasure in visiting the poor and helping them so far as her scanty means had permitted her to do so, and she would now have better and larger opportunities for it. Difficult as it is for women to procure a maintenance, if they do possess it, they commonly find their mission in life earlier than men; now and then, it is true, they astonish all beholders by some unexpected action, such as a belated and ill-chosen marriage, but these are the exceptions. In her youth and beauty, Rose Barton had, as it were, taken the veil and vowed to promote the happiness of others rather than her own. There are many such women in England, though our convents are but few. This resolu-

tion, however, in no way detracted from her interest in her new home; her character was more domestic than that of her sister, and to be the right hand of her mother in the matters of the house had its place in her aspirations.

To see simple Mrs. Barton taking possession of her new kingdom was, indeed, one of the pleasantest sights conceivable; though nobody but herself could think anything "too good for her," she rather shrank from the splendours, unusual in a rectory, with which Mr. Giles had surrounded himself. The idea of taking such furniture at a valuation appalled her; but the sum suggested was not, after all, excessive, and Mr. Barton could not resist the temptation of seeing his wife in a position more suitable to her worth and her desires.

After a long day's survey of their new home, they returned to their old one to receive the Jermyns and Dr. Greystone at dinner. The doctor complained bitterly to his hostess of her husband's appearance, which, he averred, was getting to be utterly unbecoming an invalid; if a ten days' prosperity had made so great a change in it, what would he want of a doctor at all in a month's time? "He is taking the bread out of my mouth, ma'am," which, considering that he had never intended to charge one shilling for his professional attendance, was an exaggeration. When we are very happy little jokes go a great way, and it would have been difficult to find a merrier company than that last dinner party at Leadon Rectory. There were jokes in common and jokes apart, and the very best of the latter kind was that which the Squire and the doctor enjoyed together on the subject of Mr. Avis. Read by the light of what had happened, that young gentleman's desire to obtain his tutor's photograph was plain enough,

and his whole scheme of duplicity received an award of approbation that is rarely bestowed upon the most virtuous of mankind.

Circumstances alter cases even with the best of us, as was shown in a day or two in the conduct of the Lord Bishop of the diocese. This divine had more than once expressed his disapprobation of Mr. Barton's conduct in the affair of Mr. Richard Rivers and Hannah Bryce; his motive, he admitted, had been doubtless good, but his behaviour had not only been quixotic, but struck at the foundations of social life. In congratulating the same gentleman upon succeeding to "a more extended sphere of usefulness," he nevertheless expressed his satisfaction that "so excellent a benefice had fallen to the lot of one who had shown himself actuated by pure and lofty ideals."

CHAPTER XL.

NEWS OF OLD FRIENDS.

ON the morning after the Bartons had migrated to their new home, they had a visitor. Mrs. Barton in the drawing-room with her two girls heard the front-door bell, and hospitably exclaimed, "That must be Mr. Jermyn, who has walked over to luncheon." She always liked people to drop in at that informal meal, for she had been accustomed to keep a liberal table for the pupils, and, as she very justly described, "what was enough for seven was enough for eight." True, there had since been a time when it had seemed that there would not have been enough for four at luncheon or any other meal, but that had passed away, thank Heaven, for ever, and had lasted for so short a space that it had not altered her habits of thought. But the step in the house was not somehow like the Squire's step. For an instant a dreadful thought struck her that it was Mr. Puddock come to say that his gift of the living had all been a mistake (for even now it seemed like a dream), but her husband had been inducted to it, and could scarcely be turned out by any human power (except for habitual drunkenness), and moreover it was the step of a younger man than Mr. Puddock.

"I wonder who on earth it can be?" she murmured; Rose echoed, "I wonder." But Clare never uttered a word, her faculty for wonder, which had been so largely drawn upon of late, having perhaps been exhausted; but that footstep made her heart beat, nevertheless. Mr. Barton, engaged on a new scheme of parish work

in his study, did not give much attention to the matter, taking for granted that the visitor was his church-warden who had promised to look in in the course of the morning; but when the door opened and revealed Guy Leicester, he sprang up and welcomed his old pupil with both hands; for, pleasant as is the sight of a friend in need, it is still more pleasant when the need is past, and the gratitude remains untrammelled by the sense of obligation.

"My dear Leicester, this is indeed kind. You are the first to visit us in our new home, and there is no man we could be more glad to see in it."

"That is most kindly said, sir, though I wish I could feel that I had deserved it. To leave a friend when in misfortune, and only to return when he is in prosperity, is not my notion of what is right, and there is a worse meanness, in my opinion, even than that—but it's one's duty to respect one's father's views."

"My dear Leicester, what are you driving at?"

"Well, it's all over now, sir, and therefore unnecessary to dwell on it; but I hope that it will be understood by you and yours that it was not through my own fault that I have not communicated with you, even by letter, during the time of your trouble."

"I remember very well, my dear Leicester," said the tutor, gently, "that in the time of my trouble you made me an offer by word of mouth which, had it been possible to accept it, would have removed the whole cause of my anxiety."

"Of course you knew that I sympathised with you, sir," said the young man, dejectedly, "but you would not let me help you, and my father would not help *me*; and though I now come with his express approval, I cannot forget that, but for a mere accident of fortune,

I should yet be forbidden to do it, and remain an object despicable to myself, and—and—to others."

Guy Leicester had had in fact a very unpleasant time of it since he had ceased to be Mr. Barton's pupil. Sir Innes was a gentleman to his fingers' tip, but he had all the prejudices of his class, and, though devoted to his son, would not listen for a moment to his passionate appeal for leave to marry his tutor's daughter. Without his consent Guy was well aware that that of Mr. Barton, and by consequence of Clare herself, could never be obtained, and the relations between father and son had become strained in consequence.

Mr. Barton's induction to Market Overt had, however, caused Sir Innes to alter his views; the incumbent of the richest living in the south of England was in his eyes very different indeed from the penniless tutor; but Guy, though willing enough to reap the benefits of the change, could not forget the obstacles that in the meantime had been interposed between him and his beloved object.

"Sir Innes, I think, was quite right, Leicester," returned Mr. Barton, gently. "It would only have distressed you to have seen us in our trouble, whereas you may be sure it gives us nothing but pleasure to welcome you now."

"And Clare, sir. May I hope that, since my father's consent has been obtained, there will be no more objection on your part."

"You do not appear to be aware, my dear Leicester," said Mr. Barton, smiling, "that this is the first time you have ever spoken to me of Clare; nor indeed has she ever opened her lips to me upon the subject. I must confess, however," for poor Leicester's face had become a study of dejection, "that I have had some suspicion

of her entertaining a tender regard for you, which must have seemed a very hopeless affair indeed. Perhaps—if I quite understand that you have your father's consent—you would like me to speak with her on the subject."

The young gentleman, one would think, had been practising for a painter's model; from a study of Dejection he changed at once to a picture of Ecstasy.

Without much doubt of the nature of the reply he would bring him, Leicester waited with beating heart for the tutor's return; but in this he was what he termed "pleasantly disappointed." The door opened, but only to admit Clare herself, and with a mutual cry of joy they fell in one another's arms.

They were a long time together, making up by very loving words for the silence that had so long been imposed upon them, and recalling that hour in the garden at Leadon with that pleasure in melancholy reminiscence which one can afford to feel when all is well.

But, though Guy and Clare were fully persuaded that they were all in all to one another, the correspondence of one of them at least was not shared in common. On the third day after Leicester had been established at the Rectory as one of the family, to Mrs. Barton's great content—for if her daughter had not found a suitor worthy of her, that lady was at least convinced that he was as worthy a one as was to be found—a letter arrived for Guy from Avis.

"MY DEAR LEICESTER,—I hear you have flown upon the wings of love to Market Overt. I don't want to remind you that, but for me, you would never have got there, nor to harrow your soul with the thoughts of what I shall suffer from Uncle Pud when old Bart grows halier and heartier every day; but I do ask you to do me the justice of acknowledging the accuracy of

my diagnosis. Remember that long before she was a coheiress (for that, by comparison, you know, is what it comes to), I told you that Miss Rose was over head and ears in love with you. However, you needn't tell her this, of course, but give her my warmest felicitations. If anybody comes down to see how the land lies at Market Overt—that is, how the incumbent is looking—pray ask old Bart (for my sake) to look as frail and feeble as he can. I should be very much disposed to be your brother-in-law—and I think Miss Clare had always a sneaking kindness for me—were it not that when Uncle Pud comes to learn that old Bart is as healthy as a sea captain, the very name of Barton will be poison to him; as the song says, 'If I can't find a black eye to my (or rather to Uncle Pud's) mind,' 'Why, then I must take to a blue one'—go a-wooing somewhere else."

This was a letter Guy could hardly show to the lady of his choice; and, indeed, it so troubled him that, when his marriage took place, Avis, somewhat ungratefully, was not invited to the wedding. Leicester felt that he could not trust him to keep silence about his mistaken diagnosis. Mr. Avis, however, did visit the family afterwards, and was very warmly welcomed, as, indeed, he deserved to be. He had not the audacity to reveal to the rector of Market Overt under what very peculiar circumstances that benefice had fallen to his lot, but Dr. Greystone and he had many a hearty laugh over it.

Mr. Puddock never alluded to the matter to Mr. Barton, and, in return for his patronage, only sent certain clerical friends of his once a week or so with introductions and "cards to view." The rector quite understood, of course, that they came about the reversion of the living, but had no idea how his continual convalescence disappointed them. He is living now in the best of health, while Mr. Puddock has long been gathered to those unknown personages, his fathers.

Avis always declared, though without much sorrowful emotion, that his uncle's unlucky purchase of the next presentation to Market Overt, and his mistaken choice of an incumbent for it, shortened his life.

The years went on very smoothly for the Barton family, their chief excitement being the frequent visits of Sir Guy (who, in the first year of his marriage, succeeded to the baronetcy) and Lady Leicester. The news of the great world they were quite content to hear from them. One item, about ten years afterwards, when there were half-a-dozen little ones hanging on to grandmamma's skirts, and making her young again, was, however, a very interesting one.

"Now, who do you think," inquired Guy of the family generally, on the occasion of one of his visits, "are the lion and lioness of the London season this year?"

"My dear Guy, how should we know?" exclaimed Mrs. Barton.

"But you do know; you know them both very well. A millionaire from Canada, who has made a fortune in timber, and his beautiful wife. Society cannot make enough of them. Can you not guess who they are? Why, it's Richard Rivers and Hannah Bryce that was. We met them the other day quite by chance, and Mrs. Rivers spoke to us, with tears in her eyes, of you and your husband, and also of dear Rose."

But dear Rose said nothing; "only smiled like a blessed saint," as Sir Guy subsequently expressed it to his wife. "I should have thought your sister incapable of nursing resentment so long."

From which we may gather that Lady Leicester also, upon her part, did not tell her husband everything.

THE END.

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